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MAGAZINE

**INFLUENCER
FATIGUE AND
THE RISE OF
RELATABLE
LIVING**

**HOW OUR HOMES CALM
OR ACTIVATE OUR
NERVOUS SYSTEMS**

**REST WITHOUT
PACKING**
Turning Your Home
into a Retreat

Homes That Heal
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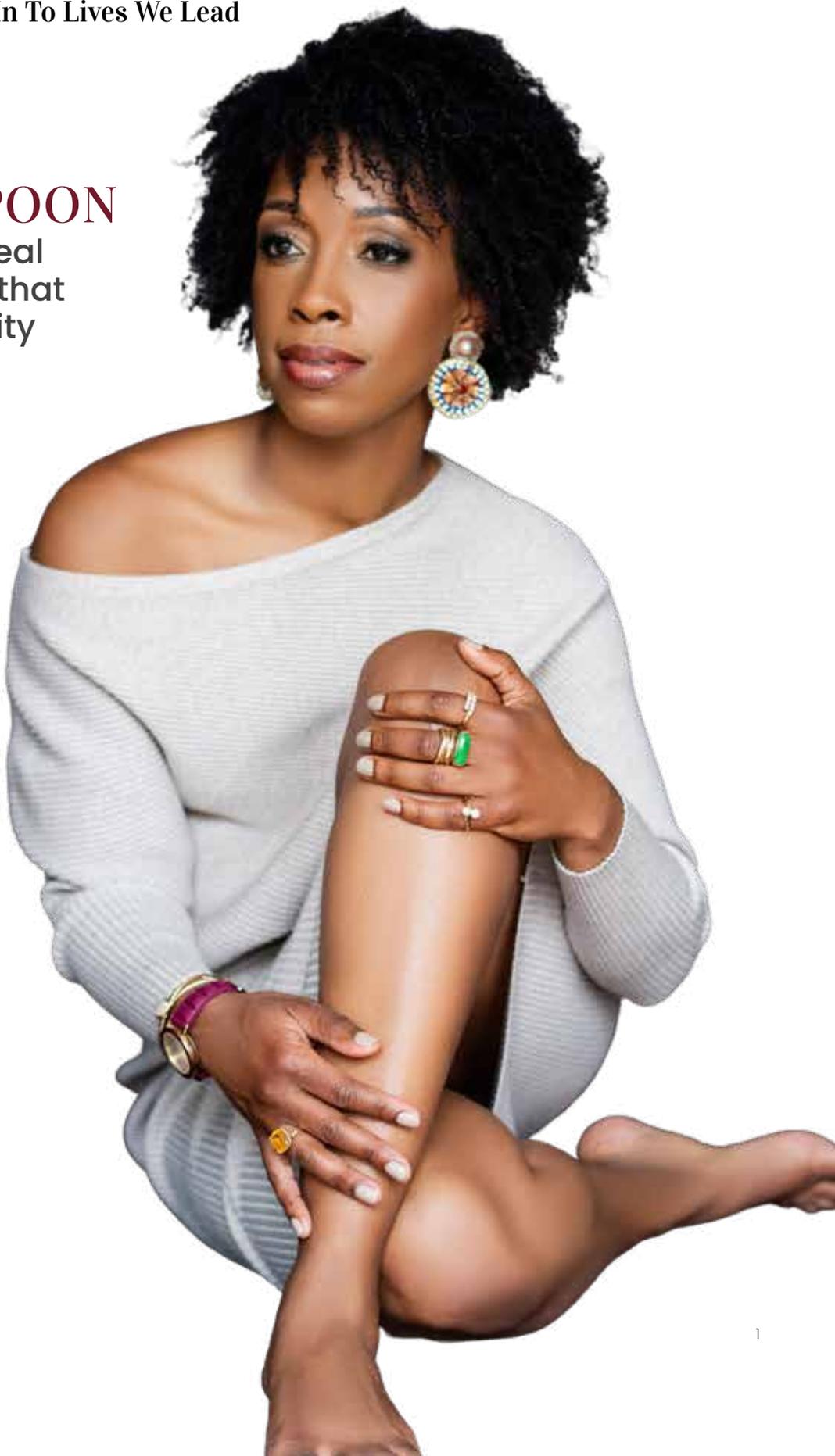
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**Restructing Home
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EDITOR'S LETTER



Your home is not just where you live; it's where you regulate, restore, and remember who you are.

For many of us, home begins as a physical place; the rooms we return to at the end of a long day, the spaces where we gather, rest, work, and dream. But over time, I've come to understand that home is much deeper than the walls around us. It's a feeling, a foundation, and a reflection of the life we're building both outwardly and within.

I'll admit something: interior design has never been my natural gift. I'm not the person who instinctively knows where the perfect chair should go or how to layer textures and colors in a way that transforms a room. But what I have always known is how a space makes me feel. I've walked into rooms that instantly feel settled; warm, cozy, and light. These are the kind of places where your shoulders drop, your breath slows, and you feel quietly welcomed just by being there. Those moments have always stayed with me.

Over the last seven years, working remotely has given me a deeper appreciation for what home truly means. When your home is also your workplace, your meeting room, your creative studio, and sometimes your refuge from the outside world, you become much more intentional about the energy of the space you inhabit.

You begin to notice how light enters a room, how silence can feel restorative, and how the smallest shifts can create a sense of calm. During that time, I realized something else as well: caring for our homes isn't just about the spaces we live in. It's also about the spaces we carry inside ourselves.

The external home is the one we can see; the rooms we decorate, the corners where we read, the chairs where we pause between tasks. But the internal home is where we tend to our peace, protect our energy, and return to ourselves after the noise of the world. Taking care of both has become an important practice for me, especially as the lines between work and life continue to blur. That idea is at the heart of this issue.

Editing this issue has been a beautiful reminder that home means something different to each of us. Through the voices of our writers, I've had the opportunity to see how deeply personal the concept of home can be. For some, home is found while traveling the world, discovering new places that awaken a sense of belonging. For others, it's about transforming their living space into a staycation sanctuary they never want to leave. And for many, home is not always a single place at all. Sometimes it's the memories, traditions, and pieces of ourselves that we carry wherever we go.

In these pages, we explore the power of home as both sanctuary and starting point; the place where wellness begins, creativity thrives, abundance flows, and hope takes root. From the physical spaces we design to the emotional spaces we cultivate, *Where We Come Home* invites us to reimagine what home truly means.

Because home isn't just the place we dwell in, it's also the place that dwells in us.

Lynnette Price

Editor-in-Chief
Hope+Wellth Magazine



Your Guide to Hope, Wellness & Wealth

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*"My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest."
~ Isaiah 32:18 (NIV)*

Our magazine celebrates and uplifts the voices of all BIPOC women, creating a space where diversity is not only represented but celebrated. We are committed to creating an inclusive environment where all BIPOC women feel seen, heard and empowered. We believe in embracing the full spectrum of identities and experiences, ensuring that our content reflects the beauty and strength of all BIPOC women, everywhere.

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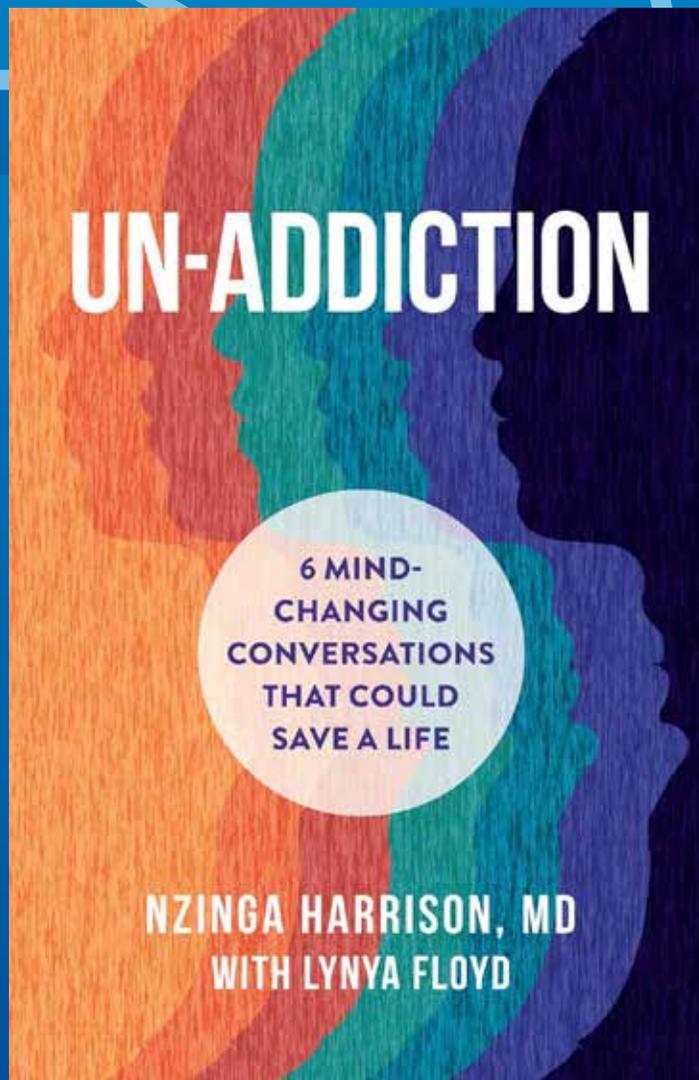
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POWER

Exploring autonomy, work, and reclaiming control of our lives

For many women, the relationship between home and work has undergone a profound transformation. The shift toward remote and flexible work has blurred the boundaries between personal and professional life, but it has also opened the door to something powerful: autonomy.

This section explores how reclaiming time, space, and presence within our homes has reshaped how women think about productivity, leadership, and personal agency. By redefining where work happens, many are rediscovering clarity, confidence, and control over how they build their lives.



FROM COMMUTE *to Clarity*

How Remote Work Changed Women's Relationship With Power

BY CINDY KUMAR

Before remote work, power had a location.

It lived in office towers. It lived in conference rooms. It lived in who had access to which floor and how often you were seen in the right meetings.

For women, especially in structured corporate environments, that visibility carried weight. You were not just doing your job. You were reading the room. Managing tone. Adjusting delivery. Being competent without being labeled aggressive. Being assertive without being called difficult.

Power was proximity.
Power was presence.
Power was performance.

Power Had a Physical Address

And the commute reinforced it.

That daily ritual was more than transportation. It was psychological preparation. You left your personal life behind, stepped into professional mode, and entered a space where authority was external and observable.

Then the commute disappeared.

When remote work became normal, most of the conversation focused on flexibility and productivity. But the deeper shift wasn't logistical. It was psychological.

Without the office, something became obvious.

When the Office Disappeared, the Illusion Did Too

A lot of what had been labeled leadership was visibility.

When you remove hallways, office drop-ins and in-person optics, you are left with one thing: value.

Can you execute?
Can you deliver?
Can you generate results without being physically seen doing it?

For many women, that shift created clarity.

If I can produce this level of impact from my dining table, what exactly was the building validating?

If I can lead through a screen, what was the proximity actually worth?

Seeing the Full Architecture of Life

There was also a more personal shift that often goes unspoken.

When women began working from home, they saw the full architecture of their lives at once. Career, family, expenses, time, energy. The separation between professional identity and personal reality narrowed.

You could see your child while leading a meeting. You could see your bills while answering emails. You could feel your own exhaustion without the buffer of an office environment.

Everything became visible at the same time.

And when everything is visible, the math changes.

Time is not abstract.
Energy is not infinite.
Compensation is not just a number on paper.

When women gained control over their schedules, they also gained perspective. The commute savings. The wardrobe savings. The hours reclaimed. The mental bandwidth restored.

From Presence to Output

You start evaluating your role differently when you can see the full picture.

You begin asking:
Am I being paid for output or for presence?
Does my title reflect my revenue contribution?
Is my power tied to performance, or to leverage?

That awareness shifts posture.

I spent nine years working inside firms before building my own practice. The environment was structured, fast-paced and performance-driven. Being responsive mattered. Being composed under pressure mattered. You learned quickly that presence was part of power. When remote work expanded, even temporarily, I saw the distinction more clearly.

The Building Was Never the Source

Output travels.
Skill travels.
Revenue generation travels.

The building had been a container.
It was never the source.



“Everything became visible at the same time. And when everything is visible, the math changes.”



That realization changes how you negotiate.

Once you understand that your authority does not require physical validation, you stop shrinking to maintain access. You stop confusing busyness with influence. You stop equating being seen with being powerful.

Leverage Is the New Language of Power

You start thinking in terms of leverage.

Leverage is skill ownership.
Leverage is financial literacy.
Leverage is understanding exactly how you create value.

The recent push toward return-to-office mandates has reignited debate, often framed around culture and collaboration. But underneath it is a quieter question about control.

Optionality Changes Everything

Women who experienced autonomy are reluctant to give it back. Not because they dislike offices, but because they tasted optionality.

Optionality is power.

Optionality means you can choose.
Optionality means you can negotiate.
Optionality means you are not operating from fear of losing access.

Remote work did not create ambition. It refined it.

It separated performance from production.
It exposed where value actually lives.
It forced women to confront what power really means.

Clarity Is the New Commute

The commute once symbolized commitment.

Clarity now symbolizes control.

And once a woman sees clearly where her leverage is, she rarely goes back to negotiating from proximity alone.

That is the shift. 



PEACE

Exploring emotional safety, healing, and nervous system regulation

Peace is often something we search for outside ourselves through rest, relationships, or escape. Yet more often than not, peace begins at home. Not only in the spaces we live in, but in the internal environments we cultivate within our bodies, beliefs, and emotional lives.

This section explores how home becomes a place where healing begins. From nervous system regulation and emotional safety to the quiet ways stress and disappointment shape our environments, these stories invite us to reconsider the role home plays in our well-being. Here, home becomes more than shelter, it becomes the place where we exhale, recover, and remember who we are.



Why Home is the First Place We Heal

Emotional Safety, Rest And Nervous System Regulation

BY ADELE OUYANG

Did you know that our earliest environments shape how safe we feel in the world? Research in neuroscience and psychology shows that early environments—ranging from emotional care to physical surroundings—profoundly shape adult emotions, behavior, and brain structure.

Home is where we first learn about ourselves, others, and how to be in a relationship. Home is where our relationship to safety is built, and as adults, we have the opportunity to rebuild it for ourselves and future generations.

The Nervous System Remembers Home

You may have heard “home is where the heart is,” but home is also where the nervous system is. Most of us can agree that “home” is often associated with the idea of comfort, love, and safety, but unfortunately, that is not the case for many of us. Did you know that 64% of adults have experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)? An ACE is an event or ongoing experience that occurs before age 18 that may traumatize and influence a child’s nervous system, sense of safety, and development.

Our first home and relationship with caregivers is where our nervous system and attachment patterns begin to develop. Our earliest imprint of home is shaped within the nervous system and subconscious: i.e., below our conscious awareness.

Part of healing means developing safety and love inward, an embodied sense of safety. In the world of somatics, this is called a “felt sense” of safety, and you guessed it, this often lives below the consciousness level. But with intention and practice, you can learn to listen to your body, inner world, and subconscious.

Home can become a powerful source of healing when we intentionally use it to nourish us and provide safety, comfort, and rest.

When Familiarity Becomes Our Definition of Safety

Neuroscience shows that the brain is wired to seek out what is familiar to us. The nervous system responds in patterned ways to stimuli it has learned to associate with safety or threat.

When we are young, we do not choose our parents, where we live, the house rules, or the emotional tone of our home.

These early experiences shape what our system comes to recognize as “normal,” even when that normal includes stress, unpredictability, or emotional absence.

Our brains perceive “home” as what we feel is normal or familiar to us, even if that goes against the ideological definition of what a home is: safety, love, and belonging.

As adults, we have the opportunity to work with our conditioning and subconscious to rewire and reprogram our patterns and our relationship to safety, love, and home.

As Stephen Porges (2011), founder of Polyvagal Theory, reminds us, “safety is the treatment.” Healing happens by creating environments—both external and internal—where the body can feel supported.

Rebuilding the Meaning of Home

As we grow older, we begin developing a deeper relationship with ourselves and attempting to create our own sense of home, often unconsciously modeled after our earlier experiences.

The challenge arises when we want something different for ourselves than what we were taught, experienced, or came to know as familiar.

Research on neuroplasticity helps explain why this can feel destabilizing. Both the brain and nervous system prioritize predictability, even over our desires and goals.

This is where our current home can become an intentional place for healing. By intentionally reconstructing our idea of home, safety, and love, we begin to offer the nervous system new experiences of regulation.

As we rebuild our (external) physical home, we can shift internal patterns. This process supports reparenting the inner child, reprogramming survival-based responses, and gradually rewiring old conditioning.

Neuroscientist Daniel Siegel (2012) describes the mind as “an embodied and relational process.” Our sense of safety is shaped by our bodies, our relationships, and the environments we are surrounded by, including our homes.

Creating a Home That Supports Healing

Over time, we can create a sense of safety and home that sustains us mentally, physically, and emotionally. Many people experience this as a process of metaphorically tearing down the old home and rebuilding it.

This can look like recognizing unhealthy patterns, reparenting your inner child, learning to show up differently in relationships, or offering yourself the care and consistency you did not receive earlier in life.

Each of us has the power to create our own sense of home, love, and belonging that supports our unique healing journeys.

Of course, there are real limitations, such as physical space, finances, time, or resources, when imagining our dream home. However, perceived safety and emotional predictability play a significant role in regulation and well-being.

As such, you can build a sense of safety and home within yourself and your environments – no matter your budget.

You create an internal container of safety that goes with you, regardless of how big or fancy your home is.

When Healing Feels Uncomfortable

Neuroscience also helps explain why creating a new version of home can initially feel uncomfortable, because when we introduce something new or different, like rest, boundaries, or emotional safety into our lives, the nervous system may respond with resistance.

This new discomfort brings discernment: your system actually learns something new, which, with repetition, can create a different experience of safety.

Building a Sense of Safety in Your Home

Step 1: Reflect on What Felt Supportive and Safe

From your childhood home, identify what felt safe and supportive that you want to recreate in your adult home.



What felt supportive, nourishing, or grounding?

What are some things you would like to bring into your current home from childhood? (This can be physical items, or it can be routines and traditions.)

Step 2: Reflect on What Felt Unsupportive or Unsafe

From your childhood home, identify what felt unsafe and unsupportive and what you want to expel from your home.

What felt unsupportive, unsafe, or threatening?

What are some things from childhood (e.g., physical items, routines, or traditions) that you don't want to replicate in your current home?

Naming undesirable experiences helps to avoid unconsciously recreating them.

Step 3: Identify What Feels like Home Now

What helps your nervous system feel calm, comforted, or at ease in your current space? Pay attention to the sensations in your body when something feels supportive.

Step 4: Invite in More of What Regulates You

Consider how you can intentionally add more regulating elements to your home.

- Conspicuously display meaningful photos (to help keep your inner child in mind. Display such childhood photo(s) in prominent, visible locations.
- Display meaningful art or childhood artwork
- Bring in elements of nature: houseplants, wood, linen, clay, nature-focused artwork or decor, keep windows and shades open
- Display sentimental objects: e.g., candles, blankets, art, pillows, and anything that brings cozy and safe vibes.

Step 5: Observe and Identify Emotional Triggers

Observe and identify the emotional triggers in your home life.

Examples:

- Disorganized desk or work area
- Array of clothing piles
- Scattered piles of things waiting to be put away.
- Piled up dishes.

Notice how your body reacts to disorder and potentially poor sanitation in the home.

Step 6: Release / Remove What No Longer Belongs

Explore ways to remove what makes you feel unsafe or uneasy.

- Donate items
- Discard objects tied to past versions of yourself
- Create a simple ritual to mark closure and transition.

Three Ways to Build Emotional Safety at Home

Routines:

- Establishing daily routines provides predictability, which helps the nervous system feel safe and supported.
- Make the bed.
- Keep the sink clean.
- Make time to wind down or meditate.
- Make an effort to keep things clean and tidy. Decluttering provides functional space for your nervous system and your brain.

A Safe Space

Create a special space for deep connection that is dedicated to rest, meditation, reflection, or spiritual connection.

Engage the Five Senses

Sight

Keep lighting low in the evenings to support winding down and relaxation.

Select decor and art that is pleasing to the eye and makes you feel joy inside

Sound

Play soft music, ambient sounds, or enjoy silence if you are easily overstimulated.

Consider turning off all music, TV or anything creating sounds from time to time to give your nervous system a reset.

Listen to a candle flicker or a mini waterfall.

Smell

Activate your sense of smell with candles, incense, or the smell of home-cooked meals.

Taste

Keep nourishing snacks available to support your nervous system and to make your guests feel welcomed.

Touch

Explore comfort-inducing home items like soft linens, fluffy blankets, extra pillows to hug, a heated blanket, warm mugs, or cozy slippers.

Home is not just where the heart is. Home is where the nervous system feels most supported.

How might you begin shaping a home that calms your nervous system and feels safe for your inner child? 

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WHEN HOME BECOMES A HAVEN

The Quiet Freedom Of Escaping Microaggressions

BY ASHLEY P. STROUD, LMSW

Turning Challenge Into Strategy

The well-known colloquialism, often misquoted but understood as “making lemonade out of lemons,” speaks to the powerful ability to extract positive outcomes from difficult, challenging, or less-than-ideal situations.

Applying this protective mindset as professional armor, particularly in complex work environments, becomes a critical question: What are the most constructive and healthy ways to adapt, thrive, and achieve success within the existing or former culture of your workplace?

The Invisible Weight of Workplace Culture

This question carries a particular weight for women of color. The professional landscape, while supposedly meritocratic, frequently presents perpetual hurdles. For a woman of color, navigating organizational spaces often causes racialized exhaustion, which adds a layer of complexity.

The challenges aren’t usually overt, blatant discrimination, which is easier to identify and address. Instead, it resides in the subtle, unspoken, and often deeply embedded implicit organizational culture.

This “unspoken culture” is a pervasive system of unwritten rules and norms. It encompasses everything from implicit guidelines on effective communication, like tone, linguistics, mentorship access, and networking strategies, to unconscious biases that significantly shape career opportunities, performance perceptions, and long-term trajectories.

These subtle barriers can create an environment where a woman of color must constantly expend energy decoding and adapting to the organizational matrix, sometimes sacrificing authenticity, code-switching, or experiencing the ‘tax’ of always performing.



Remote Work as a Catalyst for Change

This issue of professional fatigue is not new, but it has become increasingly recognized and exacerbated in the working environment. In many situations, a forced transition toward remote-first and hybrid work models, largely accelerated by the recent global pandemic, presents a unique, critical, and timely opportunity to actively address and mitigate this pervasive professional exhaustion.

In fact, the pandemic acted as a major catalyst for the expansion of teleworking. According to an online article from the Institute of Women's Policy Research, titled "*Remote Working: An Underrecognized Tool for Reducing Health Inequality*," the prevalence of telework saw a drastic increase across the labor market, particularly benefiting workers in professional and managerial occupations (Hassouna, 2025).

This shift demonstrated feasibility and, in many cases, the effectiveness of working from home. However, the benefits of this teleworking revolution have not been distributed equitably to women of color, not in managerial or professional positions.

The article highlights a significant disparity, noting that "even if you work in management and professional occupations, Black and Latina women were still less likely to have access to remote work than other women" (Hassouna, 2025).

This reveals that while remote work can be used as a tool for reducing health and professional inequalities by increasing flexibility, the structural and systemic barriers that limit access to these opportunities persist along racial and gender lines.

Organizations must also commit to intentionally dismantling these inequities to ensure that the benefits of flexible work models are accessible to all employees, particularly those historically marginalized groups who may benefit the most from reduced commute times and increased work-life autonomy.

The Equity Tension Within Flexible Work

Remote work is highly preferred by employees of color (80-86% preference for hybrid/remote), who report an enhanced sense of belonging and fair treatment when working from home. This suggests remote environments mitigate office-based microaggressions and biases (Agovino, 2022).

However, this employee benefit faces a critical counterpoint from managers, whose skepticism creates a potential risk for equity. Nearly 70% of supervisors believe remote workers are more easily replaceable (Agovino, 2022), and 42% admit to proximity bias, forgetting remote staff when assigning tasks. Nearly three-quarters of managers prefer all subordinates to be on-site.

This incongruence is a challenge: the flexibility that supports the well-being of people of color and women could simultaneously undermine their careers through managerial bias and reduced visibility.

Companies must address these biases to prevent flexible work from becoming a "lackluster" experience that penalizes those who benefit from it most.

While these new structures introduce their own set of challenges regarding visibility and connection, they also offer a degree of psychological safety and flexibility that can be leveraged.

Understanding and mastering the art of "making lemonade" in these evolving workplaces is not merely a self-help exercise; it represents a form of psychological first aid for women of color across the globe.

It is about developing resilience, cultivating strategic self-advocacy, and establishing healthy professional boundaries, ensuring adaptive professional growth rather than silent exhaustion.

Restoring the Body Through Movement

One example is using exercise as a potent neuropsychological and somatic pathway for mitigating the detrimental effects of work-related stress.

Through physical activity, the body naturally initiates recovery processes, replenishing essential neurochemicals and adaptogens that are crucial to maintaining healthy physiological homeostasis. This biochemical restoration is key to preventing burnout and sustaining high performance over the long term.

Achieving a state of thriving, rather than merely surviving, in the complex environment of the modern workplace requires strategies as nuanced and multifaceted as the often-unspoken organizational culture itself.

These strategies extend beyond individual effort and must encompass

strategic visibility, active mentorship, and ensuring one's contributions are recognized and valued.

You can intentionally build community, forging strong professional networks that provide support and insight while increasing your emotional and professional bandwidth.

Flexibility as a Foundation for Well-Being

A growing body of research highlights the powerful synergy between workplace flexibility and an employee's ability to maintain a consistent exercise routine.

The Institute of Women's Policy Research, in a pivotal study titled "*The Intersection of Workplace Flexibility and Exercise by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity*," provided compelling quantitative evidence of this link.

The research indicated that flexibility, particularly access to remote work options, significantly impacts health behaviors. Specifically, women with access to remote work were 41.4 percent more likely to engage in exercise on any given day than their counterparts without such access (Binderiya Byambasuren, 2025).

This finding underscores that structural workplace policies, such as flexible scheduling and remote work, are not just perks but critical determinants of employee health and resilience, directly enabling the time and mental space needed for self-care activities, such as physical exercise. 

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ROOTED WITHIN

Building a Sense of Home Inside Yourself

BY ADELE OUYANG

Have you felt lately that it can be difficult to feel steady in today's modern world: political tension, social division, economic uncertainty, and personal stress all place pressure on the nervous system. While we cannot always control what unfolds externally, we can learn to influence how our internal system responds. Nervous system education offers more than stress relief; it offers agency and the ability to create your own sense of home internally.

Nervous System Education as Agency

This is where nervous system education and regulation can create a huge impact. When we can understand what's going on in our inner world, our internal management begins to affect how we show up and relate to our outer landscape. External conditions will constantly shift and change in ways we can't control.

While we can't control these external factors, we can learn to develop the agency skills to manage our internal world through our somatic experience. When we begin to notice the sensations, impulses, and physiological cues in our bodies, we step into a different kind of power; the power to respond rather than react.

Polyvagal Theory and the Pathway of Safety

Stephen Porges (2011), developer of Polyvagal Theory, transformed how we understand trauma and the nervous system through his work on the vagus nerve. For years, we believed the nervous system had two states: fight-or-flight and rest-and-digest. Porges identified a third

pathway, the ventral vagal system, which is responsible for safety, connection, and social engagement.

The Autonomic Ladder: Home and Home Away From Home

Deb Dana, LCSW (2022), developed a visual and analogical representation of polyvagal theory called the autonomic ladder. According to Polyvagal Theory, we have three main nervous system states: ventral, sympathetic, and dorsal. We move through these states like you would a ladder; there is a hierarchy, ventral at the top, sympathetic in the middle, and dorsal at the bottom.

Dana describes the ventral as our home, our safe place. This is the nervous system state we enter when we are feeling and physiologically sensing safety. In ventral, we are connected, present, regulated, and open to relationships. When we get to know

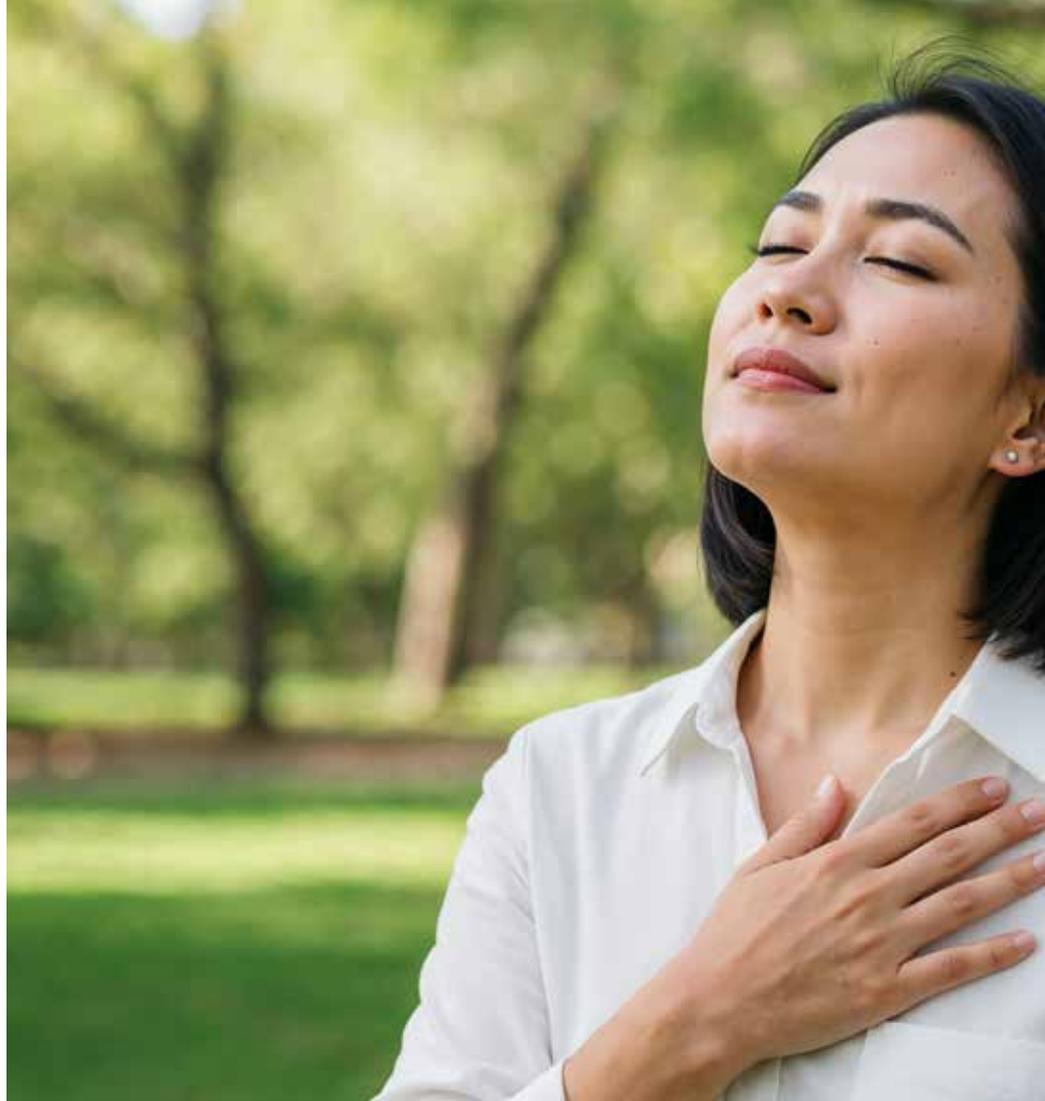
our unique nervous system, we can learn how to move up and down our metaphorical ladder, bringing us home whenever we need.

Sympathetic and dorsal are the nervous system states we move into when we feel stressed, overwhelmed, threatened, or unsafe. Dana refers to these as "home away from home." They are places we go that we know well, because these states often become our way of adapting and responding to our environment. Sympathetic may look like anxiety, urgency, irritability, or over-functioning. Dorsal may feel like shutdown, numbness, exhaustion, or disconnection.

When Dysregulation Becomes the Baseline

While all nervous system states serve a purpose and are necessary for survival, the stress of our modern society often leaves us stuck in these states of stress, anxiety, overwhelm, and survival. When this happens, dysregulation can become

"We may not be able to control the world around us, but we can learn to tend to the world within."





our baseline, and this feels nothing like being at home within ourselves.

Environment, Interoception, and Felt Safety

Many of us grew up in, or currently navigate, stressful or unsafe homes. We may deal with painful familial dynamics or experience toxic work environments. The environment plays a huge role in our sense of safety, belonging, and well-being.

In her book, *How Emotions are Made*, Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017) states that “interoception is also one of the most important ingredients in what you experience as reality.” Interoception is the ability to sense and feel what is happening in your body. Outside forces will always influence the kind of home we grow up in, or even the one we establish as adults.

Yet, alongside these external realities, interoception is the internal force within us that can help us feel at home with ourselves, no matter how chaotic the world around us feels. Through nervous system regulation and somatic awareness, we can cultivate a felt sense of safety, and we

can begin to create an inner home that remains steady even when the outer world feels uncertain.

“Safety is the Treatment”

Porges (2011) is well known for his argument that “safety is the treatment.” In other words, to heal, feel safe, or process trauma, we need an embodied sense of safety. Not just the idea of safety but the felt sense of it in our bodies. From this perspective, we can create a sense of home internally.

We may not be able to control the world around us, but we can learn to tend to the world within. And from that place of embodied safety, we begin to move through life with greater clarity, connection, and hope.

Getting to Know Your States: Returning to Your Internal Home

Rooted within is not about eliminating stress. It is about recognizing your nervous system states and learning how to return to regulation more intentionally.

Accessing Your Internal Home State (Ventral)

The ventral vagal state is our state of regulation.

It is characterized by:

- Connection
- Presence
- Ease
- Curiosity
- Flow
- Joy
- Emotional flexibility

When we are in ventral, we feel “at home” within our bodies. We can think clearly. We can connect. We can rest without fear or anxiety taking over us.

Reflection: Recognizing Your Ventral State

Take a moment to reflect:

When was the last time you felt ease, openness, and connected?

What did your body feel like?

What was your breathing like?

How did you relate to yourself and others?

This state becomes your internal guidepost, your reference point for safety, your inner home. Even if it feels distant at times, it is not gone. This is the nervous system state you can rely on to come home to. It is a physiological capacity you can strengthen, just like the feeling of going home.

You can access ventral states intentionally through:

- Meditation
- Visualization
- Gentle embodiment practices
- Safe relational connection
- Slow breathing with extended exhales

The Goal Isn't to Stay—It's to Return

The goal is not to stay in ventral all the time, as that is unrealistic and biologically impossible. The goal is to know how to return. That same feeling you may get when you travel or leave home for a while, the quiet reassurance that you have somewhere safe to return to.

Building Awareness of Sympathetic and Dorsal States

Rooted within begins with awareness. Sympathetic activation may feel like:

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Racing thoughts
- Urgency
- Tightness in the chest

Dorsal shutdown may feel like:

- Numbness
- Fatigue
- Disconnection
- Brain fog
- Withdrawal

Instead of judging these states, begin noticing when you are pulled into them.

Ask:

What does activation feel like in my body?

What does shutdown feel like?

When you can name your state, you reduce its power.



“The key to any home is personalization.”

Creating Your “Return Home” List

Once you recognize your patterns, create a personalized list of practices that help you return to regulation.

Your list might include:

- Orienting to the room, becoming present to your surroundings with your five senses
- Taking a warm bath
- Gentle stretching
- Breathwork
- Stepping outside and feeling the sunlight
- Listening to calming music
- Placing a hand on your heart
- Calling a trusted friend

The key to any home is personalization. Regulation is individual. It’s your unique way of building and maintaining your home within. Over time, you will notice that returning home becomes faster. More automatic. More embodied. Take some time to reflect on what you noticed about your nervous system responses and patterns, or which practices you include in your daily routine to regulate your nervous system and “return home”?

A Home That Cannot Be Taken From You

We cannot change what goes on outside of us and around us. But we can change how we relate to it, and that’s the goal of creating an internal home. This is something we build within the body that carries us through every environment we enter, and we each have the luxury of creating this for ourselves. This is the kind of home that cannot be taken from you. 

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CREATING A SANCTUARY

How Our Homes Calm or Activate Our Nervous Systems

BY GLENNY ROSARIO, LIFE COACH

How the spaces we live in shape emotional safety, rest, and regulation

When Home Teaches the Nervous System to Stay Alert

For much of my life, I believed rest was something I had to earn.

I grew up in a family where chaos was the norm. There were frequent fights, raised voices, and emotional drama. Home was unpredictable. I never knew what mood someone would be in—or when things might explode. Growing up in that kind of emotional inconsistency taught my nervous system to stay alert at all times: to read the room, anticipate moods, and prioritize survival over softness.

Even as an adult, I carried that

hypervigilance into my relationships—and into my home. My body never fully relaxed. Rest felt uncomfortable. Silence felt suspicious. Calm felt temporary. And when it was calm, it felt boring.

Learning That the Body Was Protecting Me

Learning about emotional safety and nervous system regulation changed everything for me.

I realized my reactions were not flaws. They were learned protections. My body wasn't broken—it was doing exactly what it learned to do to survive. Healing didn't begin by forcing myself to "calm down." It

began by offering my body proof of safety, one small choice at a time.

If Home Does Not Feel Calm Yet

If home does not feel calm yet, please hear this: you are not failing.

Your body has been protecting you. You are allowed to create safety slowly.

You are allowed to redefine what "home" means.

You are allowed to rest before everything is resolved.

How Our Homes Can Activate the Nervous System

The nervous system does not respond to walls, décor, or how pretty a space looks. It responds to felt safety.

A home can activate the nervous system when it includes emotional unpredictability, unresolved conflict, criticism, emotional distance, or constant noise and clutter. Even subtle experiences—like tension in the air or needing to monitor someone else's mood—can keep the body in survival mode.

For me, home was the first place I learned to stay alert.

If that was your experience too, it makes sense if rest does not come easily at home. Your body is responding to memory, not logic. You are not "too sensitive." You are responding to what once felt unsafe.

The Nervous System Responds to Felt Safety

Our nervous system operates in two primary modes.

Survival Mode

This is the body's protection system. It shows up as fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Your heart rate may increase; your breathing may feel shallow, and your thoughts may race. Survival mode is essential in moments of real danger—but exhausting when it becomes your default.

Safety Mode

This is the state that allows rest, connection, digestion, creativity, and emotional openness. In safety mode, your body feels grounded and your mind can slow down. This is where healing, joy, and intimacy happen.

Regulation doesn't mean you never enter survival mode. It means your body knows how to move out of it—and return to safety.

What Dysregulation Looks Like

Dysregulation can show up in everyday, very human ways. It may look like:

- Anxiety or constant worry
- Irritability or emotional overwhelm
- Emotional numbness or shutdown
- People-pleasing
- Chronic tension or exhaustion

Many people blame themselves for these responses. But dysregulation is not a character flaw. It is a biological response to feeling unsafe or overwhelmed—often learned very early in life.

How to Create a Sanctuary That Calms the Nervous System

Creating a sanctuary does not require perfection or expensive changes. It requires intentional safety cues.

Predictability

Gentle routines signal safety to the nervous system. Small, consistent habits help your body know what to expect.

Sensory Calm

Soft lighting, comfortable textures, and soothing sounds help the body settle.

Decluttering Your Space

Reducing visual clutter helps the mind feel more organized and the body feel calmer. A tidy, intentional environment sends a powerful signal of safety.

Spaces of Permission

Create a small area—maybe a chair, a corner, or even a closet—where you can reset. It doesn't need to be big or beautiful. It just needs to be consistent. A place where your body learns: *when I sit here, I can slow down, breathe, and come back to*

myself.

Emotional Boundaries

Reducing exposure to criticism, conflict, or emotional chaos matters more than most people realize.

Compassion

Allowing yourself to rest without guilt is one of the most powerful forms of regulation.

Sanctuary is not about escape.

It's about teaching your body that it is safe now. 



My Love Letter to You

If you are reading this and home still feels heavy, please know this: you are not behind, and you are not broken.

You may be teaching your nervous system something it never learned before—that safety can exist in quiet moments, in stillness, and in rest. Your home doesn't have to be perfect to be healing. It only needs to be honest, intentional, and kind to your body.

Every time you choose softness, every time you pause, every time you create even a small moment of peace—you are rewriting what home means. And that matters more than you know.

May your home become a place where your shoulders soften, your breath deepens, and your nervous system finally learns that it is safe to stay.

Life Coach Glennie



What Nervous System Regulation Really Means

Nervous system regulation is your body's ability to return to a calm, steady state after stress.

In simple terms, it's how well your body can settle itself when something feels overwhelming or threatening. When you're regulated, you can think clearly, feel present, and respond instead of react. When you're not, your body stays on high alert—even when nothing is technically wrong.



What Belief Looks Like After Disappointment: How Home Holds Us While We Learn to Trust Again

BY REQUEL JASMINE

I believed this was our year.
Not casually. Not wishfully.
I believed it with the kind of conviction that rearranges your life.

The kind of belief that makes you pack up everything you own and move in with family so you can save. The kind that makes you drive your child more than twenty-five miles to school every day, then sit in a library working remotely until dismissal. The kind that whispers, This sacrifice is temporary. This is how God builds something lasting.

I believed that year of surrender would open the door to my first single-family home a place for my daughter and me to land, to grow, to finally stretch into rooms that belonged to us. I believed it would become our first rental property someday, the beginning of legacy. Stability. Rest.

I believed.

And belief, when you're building toward something unseen, is expensive.

The Long Road to Yes

It took six months to secure a pre-approval.

Five months to find the right lender.

Countless documents. Phone calls. Waiting. Explaining. Waiting again.

I found a lender offering down-payment assistance. Ten thousand dollars. A lifeline. Evidence, I thought, that God was aligning things behind the scenes.

Then came house shopping.

Offer after offer. Loss after loss.

Anyone who has walked the home-buying journey knows this rhythm: you try not to fall in love with walls and windows, yet you still picture your life there. You still imagine where your couch would sit. Where your child would do homework. Where Christmas mornings might unfold.

So you tell yourself: Don't attach. Just assess.

But hope is not clinical. It breathes.

And losing house after house is emotionally taxing even when you know it's "normal."

I stayed steady. Detached enough to protect my heart, invested enough to keep going.

Then finally an offer was accepted.

A door opened.

And the same week it opened, another slammed shut.

When Loss Collides With Promise

The week my offer was accepted, I was let go from my job.

Not just any job — a role I didn't even know I was praying for until I had it. Work that felt aligned. Meaningful. Secure.

In a single week, I moved from homeowner-to-be to unemployed.

Disappointment is too small a word.

I fought for months after that. Tooth and nail. I shifted debt. Paid down balances. Reworked ratios. Negotiated numbers. Did everything within human reach to keep the loan alive despite my reduced income.

I fought because belief does not surrender easily.

But the loan still fell through.

The house was gone.

The job was gone.

The savings were nearly gone.

And the year of sacrifice — the storage units, the shared rooms, the long drives — felt suddenly suspended in a question I couldn't answer:

What was it all for?

The Return of Old Shame

Loss rarely arrives alone. It brings old ghosts.

When the home fell through, shame resurfaced — sharp and familiar. The same shame I carried as a teen mother walking school hallways feeling exposed, behind, judged.

I felt it again.

I had sold my condo believing it was the stepping-stone to our next level. I had uprooted my daughter and myself for what I trusted would be temporary sacrifice leading to promise.

Now I was starting over. Again.

Disappointment began to feel dangerously familiar. Like a pattern. Like a verdict. Like maybe I had believed wrong. Planned wrong. Trusted wrong.

I didn't know how to continue without breaking.

I still don't have all the answers.

The Quiet Mercy of an Apartment

All the money I had managed to save went toward securing a new apartment.

Not the single-family home.

Not the investment property.

Not the dream.

An apartment.

And yet — the first night there, something unexpected happened.

We had space again.

My daughter had her own bed again.

We were no longer in a borrowed room.

No longer sharing a tumble bed.

No longer suspended between belonging and intrusion.

We were home.

Not the home I imagined.

But a home nonetheless.

That Christmas, we decorated our apartment. We placed ornaments. We rested. We breathed. We stretched into rooms that were ours, even if rented. Even if temporary. Even if different from the vision I had held so tightly.

Gratitude did not erase disappointment.

But it sat beside it.

What Belief Looks Like Now

I used to think belief looked like certainty fulfilled.

Now I know: belief after disappointment looks quieter.

It looks like making a home in a place you never planned to land.

It looks like acknowledging heartbreak without abandoning hope.

It looks like continuing when outcomes contradict expectations.

It looks like trusting God without understanding His timing.

It looks like surviving the collapse of a dream without collapsing yourself.

Belief now is not loud declarations about what's coming next.

It is smaller. Truer. Hard-won.



It says:

I don't know what you're doing.
I don't know why this fell apart.
I don't know when I'll rebuild.
But I'm still here.

And sometimes, that is the holiest form of trust there is.

Home as Witness

Our apartment holds a story my future house never could.

It holds the year everything unraveled — and I did not.

It holds the place where shame resurfaced — and did not win.

It holds the season where belief lost its certainty — and became endurance.

One day, I may stand in a single-family home. Perhaps even the investment property I once envisioned. Perhaps something entirely different.

But whatever comes next will not be my first evidence of faith.

This apartment already is.

Because belief did not die when the dream did.

It moved in with us. 



When Stress Takes Up Residence

How Stress Lives In Our Homes And How To Release It

BY DR. SHANÉA THOMAS, LICSW, CSE

With the year still feeling new, but many of our woes, worries, and the boxes of old trinkets that you promised to get rid of from last year are still staring at you, you may already feel behind on the “new year, new you” trend. If you are juggling work, family, social stressors, and caring for yourself, finding the emotional energy to clear your space might feel like an uphill battle. When you come home or leave your designated workspace after working from home, it is hard to relax amongst physical and emotional clutter when there is no break in sight. This experience can be defined as stress, the physical or mental response to a situation or cause outside of ourselves. The National Institute of Mental Health (2020) says experiences of stress can happen once or become chronic over time, and the American Institute of Stress (n.d.) states this experience can affect everything from our nervous system’s ability to calm itself down, while also increasing our risk of respiratory and heart strain, as well as decreasing our sexual drive! Even with people working from home, which can be seen as a blessing, it also blurs the lines between work and relaxation within your space, giving your stress more room to thrive. This experience can feel like an impossible cycle that feels void of true rest and restoration.

So, how can we find ways to reclaim our spaces during times when overwhelm and turmoil flood the rooms of our homes? Here are three gentle suggestions for you to get started on releasing the stress from your home and making space for healthier and restorative emotional energy:

You are the Compass of Your Space

The answers you need to release stressful emotional energy in your living space to better align with how you want to live or feel

is first to give yourself the permission to make the change. It is easy for us to look at material changes to adjust how we feel, such as obsessing over the new color swatches from the local hardware store; this is the mistake many of us make in using things to replace or represent how we feel. Before you break out your wallet, let’s center the most valuable thing we can already offer to our space...ourselves. Using yourself as a compass to how things should look and feel should be the first step to you internally understanding how to choose to eliminate emotional stress from your space. Think, what are some things you love or are naturally drawn to? What are the smells, scents, symbols, and structures that get you through the day? What are some things about your ancestry or lineage that color your individual path to wellness? Using ourselves as a compass to align our energy with the spaces we inhabit isn’t just about being financially practical, but respecting who we are spiritually, culturally, and intuitively. Imagine: A part of the answer of shaping your space and releasing energy that is not allowing you to feel liberated and centered might be hidden in your history all along. Nothing better to beat external stress than internal strength!

Redecorating by Adding Your Magic to Old Things

Now that you have made your decisions on what to change, the fun part happens...decorating! This can easily be a stressful part of the process, especially if you are one with high taste and shallow pockets! After watching endless videos on Instagram and reading countless Home and Garden magazines, the task of re-shifting your home through decorating and rearranging probably feels like you need to go on a shopping spree to West Elm or The Container Store. Let’s not make this process more stressful than it needs to be; we are trying to eliminate, not add stress! Before you buy all the things in your Amazon account, think about the small touches that could be done or the items that you already have to spruce up a room. Just getting a sample can of paint to add some color to wall trimming to brighten a room, or rearranging furniture from one room to another, may scratch the itch of buying new or pricey things until you are able. Also, think about what is the space is already naturally offering to you—where is the sun prominent, in the morning or the evening? It might be nice to decorate a sitting area in the sunlight, or a place to plan your morning tea.

Okay, so you really get joy out of purchasing new knick-knacks, but still on a budget? This is where you can find hidden

treasures in discount, thrift, and second-hand stores if you are low on funds. Finding items for your bedroom, bathroom, or kitchen, like trash cans, baskets, or soap dishes, can be great finds in larger department stores, especially if you are not quite sure of your theme but want something cheap that can be easily replaced later. Second-hand store purchases can be magical as well, giving you the opportunity to add your energy to a previously loved charm, painting, or book, and good for adding older, comforting energy to your space. Also, remember from our first point: this must feel good to you. Trust your own intuition; whatever energy lies inside that item, believe in your natural and ancestral ability to cleanse it and add your own magic to it!

Surround Yourself with Living Things

Lastly, beautiful sentiments from authors such as Joseph Campbell, who discusses creating sacred spaces as places where you can “find yourself again and again”. In the book *The Temple in the House: Finding the Sacred in Everyday Architecture*, Campbell speaks of the experience of when you enter through the doors of your abode, the items in your environment should uplift your spirit and be a place of “creative incubation”. This is a dreamy way of saying your space should be a place of evolution and growth. We are all human beings and the experiences of stress, we hope, are temporary, so have faith that there will be days of light, ease, and rest coming your way. Until then, build a space that allows you to move and change with you. This connects to the beginning point of giving yourself permission.

As the world turns, so do our emotions. If we are choosing to release



stress within a space, we need to have a place to send it, or else it will just be swirling between our own walls and unkindly meeting you again and again. Make a path for the energy to move out of your space by opening your doors and windows often and connecting to nature by bringing in plants to help add oxygen to the space, stones or crystals, or low-maintenance living beings, such as fish or snails! Lastly, when you are comfortable, open your space to other people! Small gatherings, brunches, arranging playdates with your kids and their friends, or quietly sharing a bowl of popcorn with a good girlfriend during a movie, just might be the energy you need to replace the stress you are experiencing.

And, just as a bonus tidbit, it is important to recognize that this concept can be a

bit complicated if you have kids or other people living with you, such as family members, roommates, or partners. Though it might feel like wind is taken out of your sails by sharing your space and not feeling as if you have a certain level of autonomy or control, making this decision communal

helps you realize you don't have to release stress all by yourself—you have living beings that can help! Once you have claimed a space to theme for yourself, does it feel ok to let your child decorate the bathroom in all Blueey décor? If you can achieve the hot pink you wanted for your bedroom, does it feel okay for your partner to move in that old leather couch from storage that has been passed down from generation to generation for the entertainment room? Dividing up the emotional energy of planning a space can also be a release, especially if we remember that no matter what age you are, stress can affect us all. 🌀

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DESIGNING DIGNITY

How interior designer

KIA WEATHERSPOON

*is transforming affordable housing,
and the way we think about home.*

Home is often described as shelter, but for interior designer Kia Weatherspoon, it is something far more powerful. The spaces we inhabit quietly shape how we see ourselves, how we regulate our emotions, and how we imagine what is possible for our lives. When design communicates care, dignity, and belonging, it can restore something deeper than comfort - it can restore belief.

As the founder of Determined by Design, Kia has become one of the leading voices redefining what thoughtful design means in affordable housing, senior living communities, and spaces serving marginalized populations. Her work challenges a long-standing industry assumption that environments designed for underserved communities must prioritize durability over beauty. Instead, she advocates for what she calls Design Equity®- the idea that every person deserves spaces that reflect dignity, cultural narrative, and care.





Kia's perspective is shaped not only by her professional experience but also by her personal journey through military service, grief, leadership, and a deep commitment to creating environments that support emotional and communal well-being. Whether designing healing spaces, reimagining community housing, or redefining workplace culture, her work begins with a simple but profound question: Can someone breathe here?

In this cover feature conversation, Kia reflects on the emotional power of space, the responsibility designers carry when shaping people's homes, and why beauty, joy, and cultural identity are not luxuries but essential parts of human dignity.

“Communally, when people don’t feel held at home, they don’t have much left to give.”

Hope+Wellth

You’ve said that design isn’t a privilege but it’s a human right. One resident even told you, “I now believe change is possible” after seeing her space. When did you first realize that the spaces people live in directly affect their belief in what’s possible for their lives?

Kia Weatherspoon

I realized it in a backwards way. I didn’t grow up with spaces that taught me I could be held, softened, or restored. I didn’t know I was missing that. And just because you don’t know you’re missing something doesn’t mean it isn’t necessary.

The first time I felt the impact of space deeply wasn’t about me. It was visiting my brother while he was incarcerated. I could feel how an environment can strip a person down, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually. Then after 9/11, being deployed overseas made it undeniable. In high-stress environments, your surroundings are not background. They dictate how your body regulates, how your mind stays steady, and whether your spirit can exhale.

That’s when I understood space is instruction. It communicates value. It communicates care. Or it communicates the absence of it. And once you feel that, you can’t unfeel it.

H+W

Through your work at Determined by Design, you’ve helped shift the conversation from durability to dignity. What do you think we lose both emotionally and communally when homes are designed without care?

Kia

Emotionally, we lose regulation. We lose peace. We lose the feeling of being considered.

And when I say “care,” I’m not talking about spending more money. I’m talking about love you can see and feel. Softness. Texture. Color. Light. Adornment. Cultural narrative. Heritage. The details that tell your body, “You’re safe enough to exhale.”

Communally, when people don’t feel held at home, they don’t have much left to give. That’s when neighborhoods start to feel like people surviving next to each other instead of living with each other. A home that’s designed with care isn’t just a backdrop. It’s a source of restoration. And restoration changes how we show up for ourselves and for each other.

H+W

You’ve worked across affordable housing, senior living, and community spaces. What are the most common design assumptions about marginalized communities that you’re intentionally trying to dismantle?

Kia

The biggest assumption I dismantle is the expectation of destruction. “They’ll tear it up, so don’t make it nice.” That’s not a budget issue. That’s a belief system. It’s a lack of care disguised as practicality.

Another assumption I challenge is that we can systemize people into healing through one broad framework. You start to hear terms like “trauma-informed design” used as a shortcut, and too often what it produces are stripped-down, neutral spaces that remove the very things that make people feel held. Color. Texture. Art. Adornment. Cultural narrative. Joy. We rename the problem, create a standard, and then design the life out of the space.

What I’m advocating for is the opposite. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. You cannot broad-stroke “heal” for everybody. You have to understand who you’re designing for, in the context of that specific community, that facility, that client, that history. Care is not a template. Empathy is not a checklist.



And cost is not the real divider. Market-rate projects value engineer too. The difference is that in too many projects serving marginalized communities, the decision-makers simply don't care enough to fight for better. What we are dismantling is that entire posture. We lead with empathy, and we design like people are worth the effort every single time.

H+W

Let's talk about your partnership with EMIR Healing Center centers trauma-informed design. Tell us more about that. What does safety look like in a physical space and how do you design for something that's emotional, not just visual?

Kia

Safety looks like choice.

If I'm grieving, I want softness within reach. I want texture I can hold onto. I want my body to have options: sit upright, curl up, stretch out, be still. Emotional safety is not a visual checklist. It's whether the space gives your nervous system somewhere to land.

I don't cling to labels and frameworks. I ask one question: can someone unclench here? Can they breathe here? Can they feel like themselves here?

That's safety. It's not just seen. It's felt.

H+W

Remote work has blurred the line between home and office. From your perspective, what does a healthy work-from-home environment actually need beyond a desk and good lighting?

Kia

Boundaries that are physical and behavioral.

If you can, work needs a dedicated room. If you can't, you still need a ritual: work turns on, work turns off. The laptop doesn't live on the couch. It doesn't travel to the bed. Because then your home stops being home and becomes a 24/7 workplace with throw pillows.

Remote work only works when you build separation on purpose. Even if that separation is a basket you put your work things in at 6pm and don't touch again until morning. It sounds simple. It's not. But it's essential.

H+W

You've built a firm while navigating grief and mental health challenges. How has your personal experience changed the way you lead and the environments you create for your team?

Kia

It didn't change the way I lead. It confirmed it.

Grief forced surrender, not in a cute quote way, but in a "my body will not cooperate" way. It required me to lean on people, stop pretending I could muscle through everything, and let care be real instead of performative.

It reinforced my leadership philosophy: we are humans first, always. I'm not building a culture where people have to perform wellness while falling apart. I want a culture where someone can say "I'm not okay" and it doesn't threaten their job security or their worth.

That's radical acknowledgment. That's love in practice. And you can't design care if you don't practice it.

H+W

Your work is about creating spaces that hold people. Where do you go, physically or internally, to feel held yourself?

Kia

My home, first. I've color-drenched it. I have art that speaks back to me. My home holds me the way I want the world to hold people: softly, honestly, and without asking me to be anything other than myself. When my dad passed, I created a wellness room because I needed a place that didn't require anything from me. Somewhere I could just exist, breathe, and come back to myself.

But being held isn't only a place. It's also people. People who choose to see you wholly. My life lady slash best friend, Dawn Myers, has been that for me. My friend Elisa is that too. Recently I walked up to her, smiled, waved, trying to act like I was fine, and she clocked it immediately. She didn't let me skate past my own truth. She just asked, "What's wrong?" and she was right. I was missing my dad.



"But being held isn't only a place. It's also people who choose to see you wholly."

And more recently, it's my boyfriend. I haven't always had healthy love, so I don't take it lightly when I say this: he exudes a kindness I didn't even realize I was missing in my support system. That kind of care changes you. It reminds you that being held can be quiet. It can be consistent. It can be safe.

So the answer is both. It's my home, and it's the people who make space for me to be fully human inside it.

H+W

Design Equity® asks us to reconsider who design is for. How do you define success when you're designing for healing rather than aesthetics or prestige?

Kia

Success is when people feel seen, not managed.

It's when the space is specific. Culturally contextual. Rooted. Not generic. Not "this could be anywhere." But "this is for us."

And I'm going to say this plainly: adornment matters. Beauty matters. Joy matters. Healing isn't the opposite of aesthetics. Sometimes beauty is the doorway to healing.

Success is when someone walks in and their body says, "Oh. I belong here."

H+W

When you walk into a space that was designed without care, what do you immediately feel and how does that emotional response inform the way you approach your work?

Kia

Anger. Immediately.

And I don't think anger is bad. Anger is information. If you don't feel it, you won't fight for better. You normalize less. You accept things you shouldn't accept.

That anger tells me what I'm responsible for: to advocate. To interrupt the quiet message a careless space sends, which is usually, "You don't matter that much."

And I refuse to design that message into anyone's life.

H+W

What does a humanity-first workplace look like in practice, not just in principle and how can design support that shift?

Kia

It looks like care without bookkeeping.

Policies matter. But humanity shows up when life happens and you don't reduce someone to a headcount or a timeline. I've supported team members through grief without counting days. I've supported new parents whose journeys didn't fit a tidy return date. People love to call that "too much."

But the trust it produces, the loyalty, the way people show up for the mission and for each other, that's what it creates.

Design reinforces that by giving people space to regulate: flexibility, quiet zones, natural light, and environments that don't punish you for being human. Culture leads. Space supports.

H+W

As more of our lives happen at home, what does it mean to create boundaries that protect rest, creativity, and mental health, especially for leaders?

Kia

First, don't take your phone into your bedroom at night. Find an alarm clock if you need one. And I've said this for years, no TV in your primary bedroom. Your bedroom has one job. Rest. If the last thing you touch at night is a screen, your nervous system never fully stands down.

Second, take your work email off your phone. I promise you, nothing is that urgent. I say this as someone who was guilty of it. I wasn't giving work my full attention, and I also wasn't fully present in my real life. I do service-based work, and it requires undivided attention. If you're in a role that's even higher stakes than mine, you need that separation even more.

Third, put your phone on Do Not Disturb. Not as a vibe. As a practice. You're allowed to be unreachable so you can be restored.

And finally, move your body. One of my favorite things to do is dance in my house. I mean dance. Not a TikTok trend. Just moving freely. Sometimes I'm near a mirror and I start hysterically laughing, because it reminds me I can see myself with lightness. It loosens what I've been holding tight, and creativity starts to come back online when your body does.



H+W

As you look toward 2026 and beyond, what does “coming home” mean to you now as a designer, a leader, and a human being?

Kia

As I look toward 2026 and beyond, “coming home” means stillness drenched in color.

It means slowing down. Sitting in my favorite chair and doing absolutely nothing. And also sitting in that same chair with my girlfriends over, laughing until the house feels full.

It also means remembering that everything is not urgent. My company is called Determined by Design, and for years that determination looked like force: dedication, persistence, pushing through. I’m still determined. I’m still a force. But now I’m moving with more ease. Less rush. More trust. I’m learning that being committed doesn’t have to mean being clenched.

Coming home is a standard now. I walk away from spaces, people, and environments that don’t hold me with care. And as a designer and a leader, I carry that same standard into my work: I create and protect spaces where people can exhale, be seen, and feel restored.

Coming home is choosing what nurtures you internally and externally, and refusing what diminishes you.

A warm, sunlit living room with a blue overlay containing text. The background shows a beige sofa, a lamp, and a window with blinds. The blue overlay is a rounded rectangle that covers most of the page, with the text centered within it.

PLACE

Exploring belonging, retreat, travel, and intentional living

Home is often thought of as a location, but its meaning stretches far beyond four walls. It is the place where belonging begins, where daily rituals shape how we experience the world, and where rest becomes possible without needing to escape our lives.

In this section, writers explore how our relationship with place influences identity, freedom, and restoration. From creating retreat-like spaces within our homes to discovering new perspectives through travel and intentional living, these stories invite readers to reimagine the spaces that hold them and the spaces that help them grow.



Belonging Begins at Home:

How Showing Up for Yourself Shapes Community

BY QUEEN

When Belonging Feels Conditional

Belonging is often misunderstood as something that must be earned through agreeableness, peacekeeping, or knowing when to soften the truth so that everyone else remains comfortable. Many women learn early that connection can feel conditional, as though it might be withdrawn the moment they assert themselves.

Yet true belonging asks something far different.

The Courage to Stay True to Yourself

It invites you to remain present with yourself even when doing so creates discomfort for others. It calls you to listen inwardly when the cost of keeping the peace becomes too high.

According to researcher and author Dr. Brené Brown (2017), belonging is not about fitting in but about the courage to stand in your authenticity. Fitting in requires you to change who you are; belonging asks that you be who you are.

When Harmony Requires Self-Silencing

You may recognize moments when maintaining harmony required you to silence your inner voice, minimize your needs, or overextend yourself emotionally. Over time, this pattern becomes less like connection and more like adaptation.

The Quiet Power of Showing Up for Yourself

Showing up for yourself does not need to be dramatic to be transformative. Often, it appears in subtle yet powerful ways, pausing instead of over explaining, allowing others to experience their emotions without rushing in to fix them, and trusting that your worth is not dependent on constant accommodation.

Choosing yourself is not a rejection of connection; it is a redefinition of it.

When Relationships Begin to Shift

When this internal shift takes root, relationships frequently change. Some connections soften and deepen. Others grow quieter and some you lose. What emerges, however, is honesty. When you stop performing belonging, you create space for relationships grounded in mutual respect rather than unspoken obligation.

Why Authentic Connection Matters

The Harvard Study of Adult Development (2017), one of the longest-running studies on human happiness, consistently shows that the quality, not the quantity of relationships is what most strongly predicts wellbeing. Authenticity, therefore, is not only emotionally liberating; it is protective.

A Midlife Reclamation

For women navigating midlife and beyond, this realization often feels both clarifying and empowering. It becomes a season of reassessing long held roles, family dynamics, and emotional agreements that were never consciously chosen.

There is growing recognition that belonging does not require shrinking, managing perceptions, or self-silencing.

Belonging to Yourself First

It requires staying.

Community begins at home, not the physical structure, but the inner one. When you belong to yourself, you no longer enter spaces wondering who you need to be. You arrive grounded. From that place, connection becomes mutual rather than conditional, supportive rather than performative.

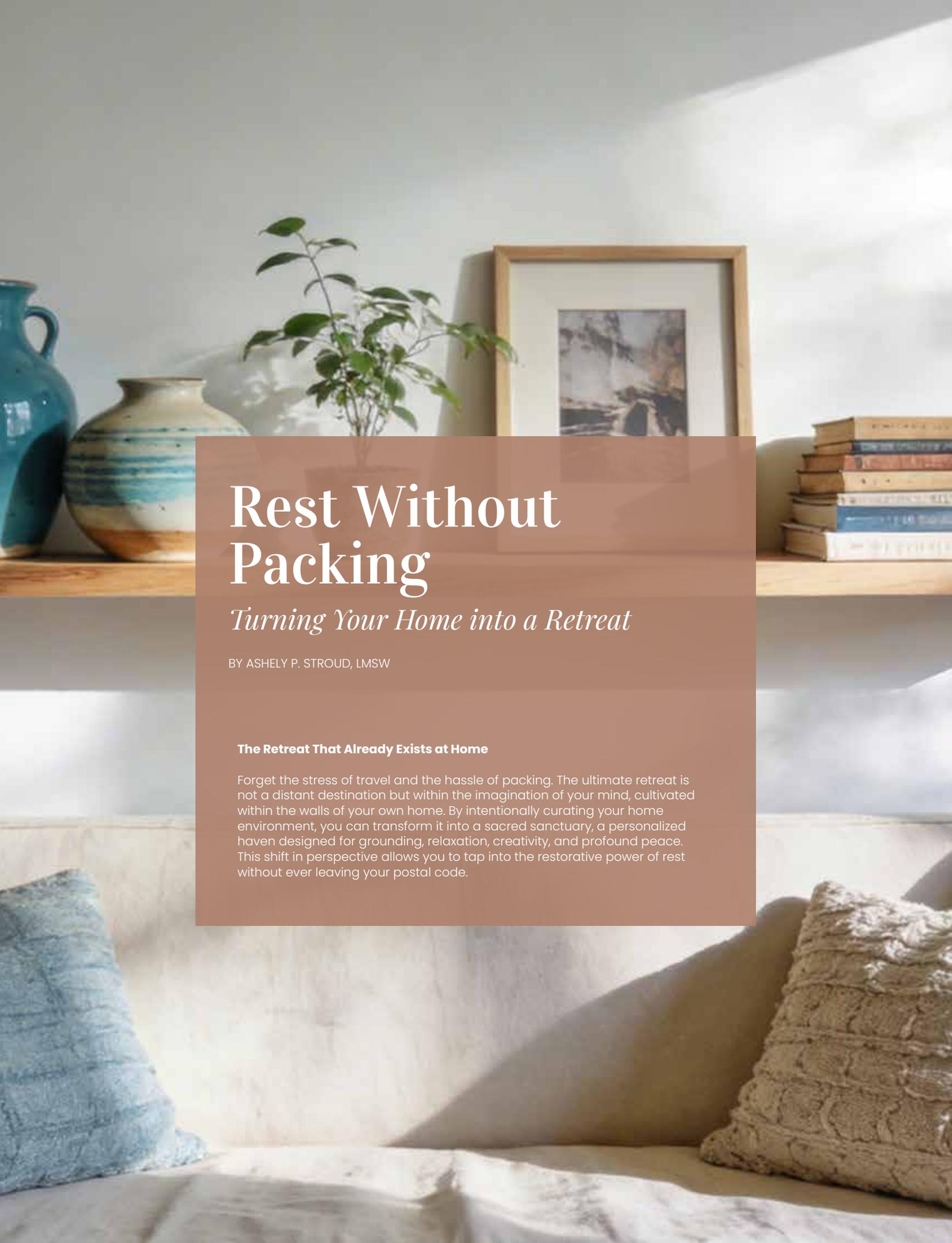
The Community You Carry Within

Belonging that begins within has the power to transform every relationship in your life. It shifts connection from performance to presence and reminds you that the most enduring community you will ever build is the one created through loyalty to your own becoming. 

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Rest Without Packing

Turning Your Home into a Retreat

BY ASHELY P. STROUD, LMSW

The Retreat That Already Exists at Home

Forget the stress of travel and the hassle of packing. The ultimate retreat is not a distant destination but within the imagination of your mind, cultivated within the walls of your own home. By intentionally curating your home environment, you can transform it into a sacred sanctuary, a personalized haven designed for grounding, relaxation, creativity, and profound peace. This shift in perspective allows you to tap into the restorative power of rest without ever leaving your postal code.

Engaging the Five Senses

A true home retreat must engage and soothe all five senses. Designate intentional areas in your home for different types of sensory stimulation. These spaces should be curated to allure your senses, calm your nervous system, and anchor you effortlessly in the present moment.

Visual: Introduce soothing colors and natural light. Create a focal point, such as a small indoor fountain or a curated shelf of inspiring, meaningful objects, or a piece of art that evokes pleasure and tranquility. Create a focal point that draws the eye and calms the mind.

Auditory: Silence can be a luxury. Establish a designated area or time for listening to calming sounds, such as nature soundscapes, jazz, classical music, or silence achieved with noise-canceling headphones. The auditory environment should buffer you from the external world's demands and distractions.

Tactile: the sense of touch is directly linked to comfort and security. Layer soft textures. Think of luxurious throws made of natural fibers like cashmere or linen, plush rugs underfoot, and comfortable seating that invite you to sink in and relax. How about those comfy pajamas or lounge wear that instantly tell your body it's time to rest?

Aromatic: Scent is the most direct pathway to memory and emotion. Use essential oil diffusers, natural incense, moisturizers, sprays, or scented beeswax candles to infuse your space with calming, cleansing, or energizing scents, such as lavender, eucalyptus, peppermint, cedarwood, lemongrass, orange, or bergamot.

Creating a Physically Restorative Environment

The physical energy of your home directly impacts your well-being. It can improve sleep quality, reduce anxiety and depression, and increase productivity. Decluttering your space and removing anything that's not functionally needed or doesn't bring joy and peace.

Ergonomic Furniture: Invest in pieces that are designed to support your body's natural posture and prevent pain. This includes a comfortable, properly angled chair for reading or meditation, a supportive, high-quality mattress and pillow system for deep, restorative sleep, and a well-designed, adjustable workspace (if you work from home) that minimizes physical strain. This deliberate physical comfort prevents unnecessary fatigue and potential healthcare appointments, allowing for a deeper level of mental and somatic relaxation.

Supporting Energy Flow in the Home

Feng Shui Principles: Embrace the ancient Chinese art of placement to create an energy flow, or chi, that is harmonious and balanced. Decluttering is essential; it clears visual noise and allows positive energy to circulate freely, promoting a sense of order and peace.

Nourishing the Body During Rest

Nourishment and easy access to healthy foods for the body and the soul are essential to your rest-and-digest cycle. A true retreat includes nourishing the body without adding stress through complex meal preparation, guilt-inducing food choices, or unpleasant somatic symptoms.

Healthy and Delicious Foods: Stock your pantry and refrigerator with whole, nutrient-dense ingredients. Focus on simple, fresh meals that are a pleasure to eat but require minimal cooking time. Think vibrant salads, easy-to-prepare whole grains, and fresh fruit for effortless enjoyment. The act of preparing these simple meals should be a meditative experience, not a chore.

Using Color to Shape Mood and Energy

The psychology of colors wields significant power over mood, energy, and creativity, and enhances daily activities. Intentionally select a palette that supports the desired atmosphere for each room.



Supporting Your Mood: Use color psychology to your advantage. Blues and green are often used in bedrooms and bathrooms for their calming, restful qualities. Warm, muted tones like soft yellows or terra-cotta can foster a sense of grounding and coziness in living areas. Conversely, reserve brighter, more stimulating colors for areas where focused activity or creativity is desired.

Enhancing Room Energy: Ensure the colors chosen to align with the room's function. A home retreat thrives on a palette that encourages tranquility and stability, allowing the mind to unwind fully without having to travel anywhere.





Home as a Passport: What Living Abroad Taught Me About Freedom and Self-Trust

BY LYNDILLE MAE CABALUNA

When Home Become Permission

I used to think of a passport as a document—stamps, borders, permission. But home can become a passport too: an internal permission slip that allows you to move freely through the world and, in time, to become a safe space for others.

I am a nurse by training and a co-founder of a non-profit organization, roles that did not remain confined to my professional life. They followed me across borders and shaped how I encountered the world. Leaving my home country did not feel like an escape; it felt like home away from home. Overseas, I encountered a way of living less anchored in certainty and more shaped by presence. Time moved differently. Priorities reordered themselves. Comfort was no longer guaranteed, but purpose often was.

Freedom Is Not the Absence of Risk

I came to understand that freedom is not the absence of responsibility; it is the willingness to remain open even when life is full of risk. In many of the places I served, I was reminded of Mother Teresa's quiet insistence on spreading love through small acts—leaving every place and person a little better than she found them. Her legacy was not about scale, but faithfulness: showing up fully where suffering exists. That philosophy became a compass for my own work—not to impose, but to impart.

Malaysia & Egypt: When Home Is Memory

In Malaysia and Egypt, for instance, I worked with refugees—people whose homes had been fractured by war, politics, and history. They carried grief and resilience side by side. From them, I learned that home is not always a physical place; sometimes it is a memory, a language, or a shared meal. Despite instability, they built a community. Despite loss, they held themselves together.

Bangladesh: Abundance in Scarcity

In Bangladesh, I discovered that belonging is defined not by blood or proximity, but by responsibility for one another. After the clinic closed for the day, villagers gathered around us with quiet anticipation. A buko was brought out—freshly opened, its water clear and cool. Smiles spread as it was offered to us, the best they had to give.

Only later did the full meaning settle in. This was a place without reliable access to clean water. The coconut water could have been saved, rationed carefully for the days ahead. Instead, it was poured out as a gesture of gratitude.

I remember holding it and feeling the discomfort of being honored in a way that asked something of them. Even in scarcity, they chose to give. In that village, survival was collective by necessity, yet generosity flowed freely. Abundance revealed itself not in what was possessed, but in the care people extended to one another.

India: The Courage to Stay

From there, my path led me to a leper colony in India. I met an elderly man who had lived with leprosy since childhood. Years of illness had shaped his body, but it was the long history of avoidance that had left the deepest marks.

As I cleaned

and dressed his wounds, he watched me closely, as though waiting for the moment I might pull away.

I stayed—steady in my work—returning again and again to tend to what needed care. When it was done, he looked at me and spoke softly. He said he had never expected someone would willingly touch him after a lifetime of being discriminated against. He told me that he felt truly loved.

His words stayed with me. They conveyed a deeper understanding of beauty—one not shaped by appearance, but by presence. In that space between suffering and care, compassion was exemplified in courage, patience, and the quiet dignity of lives lived fully despite pain and stigma.

Nepal: Joy That Endures

Working with orphans in Nepal further reshaped my understanding of purity—not innocence untouched by pain, but joy that endures despite it. I sat with children who sang their hearts out,

thanking God for seeing and caring for them even as the world had been harsh. They had lost much, yet still reached readily for connection and laughter. From them, I learned that grace grows in the cracks and that resilience is nurtured through relationships.

Becoming Home

These experiences reshaped how I see the world—and myself within it. My intuition sharpened, and my judgments softened. What I once believed to be fixed or universal revealed itself as molded by my own limited frame of reference. Beyond it existed countless realities, each deserving understanding rather than

prejudice. When familiar structures dissolve, certainty loosens, and self-trust grows through immersion—through learning from the world as it unfolds.

Home, now, is the lessons I carry. It lives in how I show up and offer steadiness in

“Beauty – one not shaped by appearance, but by presence.”

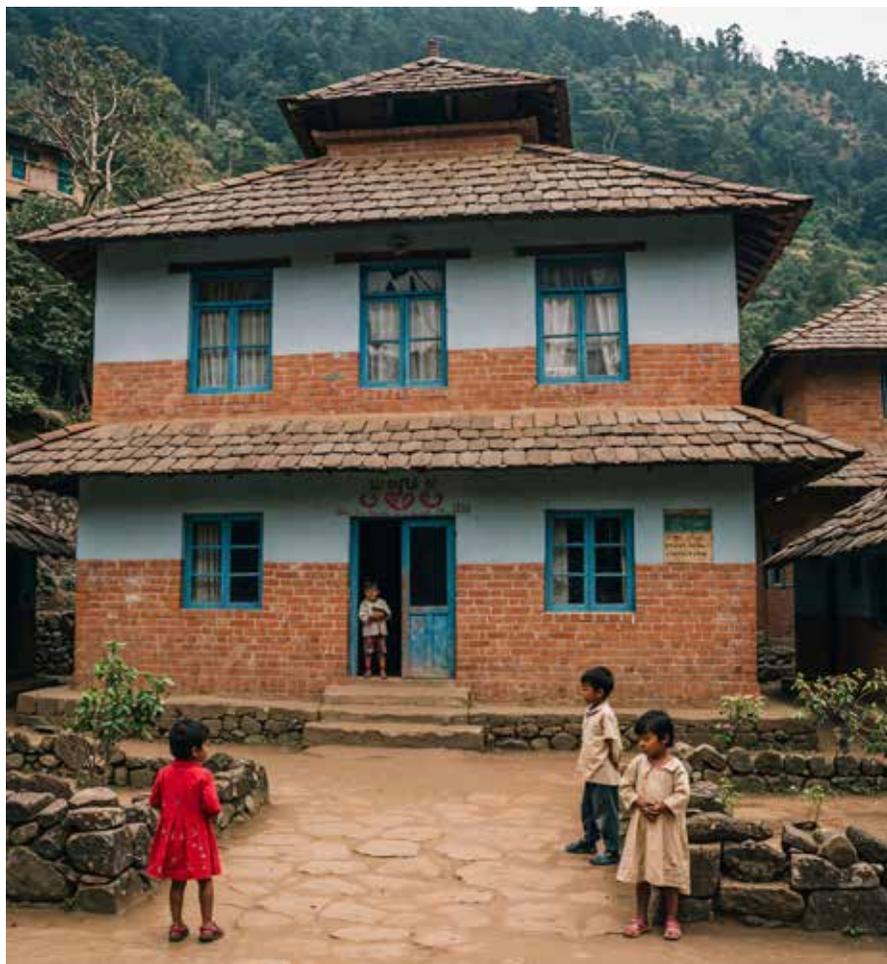


uncertain places. It is the courage to enter unfamiliar territory with humility, leaving behind traces of peace—a quiet reflection of heaven here on earth.

My passport may list where I am from, but my life across countries taught me more about who I am. What remains most vivid are not statistics or outcomes, but people—their hopeful joy. I remember families wrapped in blankets during cold seasons, children whose eyes glimmered with reassurance through education, villages transformed by access to clean water, and the relief of those restored to health and assisted with housing programs. I may not have their smiles framed or preserved, but they remain etched within me.

And wherever I go, I carry this truth: a

passport may open doors, but real freedom lies not in belonging everywhere. It lies in trusting deeply enough that I become a refuge—a place where others feel they belong, an essence of home in a hurting world.





Soft Life Starts at Home

Rituals That Turn Daily Living Into Care

BY SHERITA GASKINS-TILLET, MD

THE INHERITANCE OF STRENGTH

On any given day my mother could be found working. She was constantly in motion cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, sewing, weeding, shopping, helping with homework, or doing our hair. And that's when she was not at her job! My siblings and I had a running joke that our mother didn't know how to rest. But it wasn't her fault. It began at home.

For generations, Black women have been taught to be hardworking, strong, and independent. Historically, we were denied the luxury of being pampered and taken care of. We had to get stuff done. Work twice as hard, be twice as good and never let them see you struggle. The "strong Black woman" script has been both our armor and our inheritance. We have been praised for our endurance. For pushing through. For holding it down on our own. If you have fallen prey to this narrative, it's not your fault either. We never learned to live gently and we are paying the price.

THE COST OF SURVIVAL MODE

Overworking costs us our peace, health, and personal well-being. Black women experience chronic health conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, anxiety, and depression at disproportionately higher rates. Our overall life expectancy is 3 years less than that of white women.

While we can't minimize the impact of systemic racism on these unsettling health outcomes, our overactive nervous systems also play a role. Our nervous systems are malfunctioning from being in constant survival mode. We are stuck in fight or flight. To break the cycle and generate the calm, peace, and relaxation we crave, our nervous systems have to be reset. We have to stop surviving and start thriving.

REDEFINING THE SOFT LIFE

For the past few years sisters everywhere have been talking about embracing their "soft-life era". The soft life is more than an aesthetic. It's not just spa days, silk robes, first class accommodations, and high-end boutiques.

According to Eva Tukuafu, LCSW (2026), the "soft life" is a conscious refusal to live in survival mode. The movement is aimed at reducing stress, choosing intention, and protecting mental health. It is deciding to choose

ease over constant grinding. To prioritize psychological safety over survival. To build a life where your guard doesn't have to always be up.

And it begins at home.

Let's level set. The soft life is not about laziness, abandoning responsibilities, or overextending ourselves financially because "we deserve it". It is about reserving your energy for the things that are most important to you. It is releasing struggle as an identity and understanding that rest is not something to be earned. Softness is not weakness. It is strength and strategy.

CURATING A SANCTUARY

Before we talk rituals, we have to talk about environment. Your home should not feel like a second workplace. It should be a sanctuary -- a safe, supportive space where you are free to be your authentic self without fear of rejection or judgement. A place where you can remove the mask and exhale. Curating that kind of environment requires intention.

Ask yourself: What does a calm, peaceful, relaxing home look like?

Your home is the foundation of your soft life. Start with decluttering. Chaos in your home often mirrors chaos in your mind. Next, prepare a feast for your senses. Fill your home with relaxing colors, luxurious fabrics, plush furniture, soothing scents, and comforting sounds. Complete your physical space with warm lighting, plants, throw rugs, cozy blankets, and affirming artwork. When the rest of the world feels heavy or busy, entering your home will immediately evoke safety and security.

BOUNDARIES CREATE SOFTNESS

Once your physical environment is soft life ready, turn your focus inward. Softness is not accidental. It is intentional.

Ask yourself: How does a calm, peaceful, relaxing home feel and how do I create it?

A first critical step is minimizing stress by setting and enforcing clear boundaries. In an article entitled "3 Reasons Why the Soft Life Movement is So Empowering", Mark Travers, PhD (2024) writes, "those with blurred boundaries often struggle to maintain healthy behaviors". Boundaries help you stay the course. You are the boss. You decide who, what, or how much is allowed to occupy your physical and

mental spaces. People who deplete your energy and steal your joy should have minimal access to you. Set limits on how much TV or social media you consume. Leave work at the office. Set your phone to "do not disturb" while you are sleeping or engaging in conversation. Designate protected time for important relationships and activities. Say no to requests that threaten your peace.

DAILY RITUALS: BECOME BEFORE YOU DO

You've set the intention to live a soft life, curated your environment, and defined your boundaries. Now you're positioned to make the soft life a way of life through daily and weekly rituals.

Basic rule of thumb: **Become before you do.**



"When your home becomes your sanctuary, you are no longer surviving your life."



- Short walks in nature
- Soothing neck and back stretches
- Deep breathing
- Stepping away for a nourishing meal
- Phoning a friend who is guaranteed to keep it light and share a belly laugh or two
- Engaging in a brief activity that brings you joy

Your nervous system was not designed for constant activation. To maintain a soft life you need to be aware of increasing stress levels so you can proactively implement strategies to mitigate the impact.

EVENING WIND-DOWN: TEACH THE BODY TO REST

Ending your day with intention is just as important as your morning routine and your mid-day resets. Your body needs clues that it is time to slow down and rest. Create a wind-down ritual that begins 2 hours before your desired bedtime. Consider:

- Eliminating screens
- Dimming overhead lights
- Taking a soothing bath or shower
- Applying body oils or butters
- Writing a gratitude list
- Reading something fun and light
- Outlining the next day on paper so the tasks are not ruminating in your mind
- Decreasing the room temperature before sleep

Softness at night sends your body the signal that it is safe to let go and rest.

WEEKLY, MONTHLY, ANNUAL RHYTHMS

Daily rituals are essential, but bigger rhythms matter too. Systems make soft living possible. Some things to think about:

Weekly

- Fresh linen and a home reset
- Designated family time
- Meal planning
- Goal review
- Financial review
- Reflection time

Monthly

- Beauty rituals – hair care, skincare, nail, and body services
- Dedicated time with friends
- A full day of rest
- Try something new

Annually

- Family vacation
- Girlfriends trip
- Couples trip
- Life audit
- Goal-setting

- Financial planning
- Preventive health appointments

Softness expands as it becomes a fixture in your everyday life, instead of an occasional indulgence or response to exhaustion.

THE INNER WORK OF SOFTNESS

The bottom line: candles, spa days, and luxury trips alone cannot fix what chronic self-neglect has created. Curating a soft life also means checking in with yourself regularly. Asking yourself, “What do I need? What do I want?”

Releasing toxic emotions like resentment, jealousy, and forgiveness.

Reframing negative self-talk.

Accepting support – you were never meant to do life alone. We are here to help and uplift one another. Ending self-neglect will help to heal the parts of you that believe your worth is tied to your work. Acknowledging your needs and desires and upgrading the way you talk to yourself sends a powerful message to the woman within: You are valuable and deserving of softness and rest.

PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION

Creating your soft life is not meant to be overwhelming. You are a high achiever, but don't try to redesign your entire life in a week. This is about progress over perfection. Start small and build from there. Declutter one room. Set one boundary. Implement one morning, mid-day, or evening practice. Consistent action is key to sustainability. On days you miss the mark, give yourself grace and start again the next day. The end result is worth it. When your home becomes your sanctuary, you are no longer surviving your life. You are living it peacefully, intentionally, softly. 🌿

Before you check your phone or respond to texts or email, perform your morning routine. A morning routine puts you in the driver's seat of your day. It anchors you before the world starts pulling you in different directions. Morning routines are personal and should fit your schedule and lifestyle. Consider incorporating things like:

- Prayer and meditation
- Reading for personal development
- Listening to podcasts
- Journaling
- Visioning
- Gentle movement – stretching, walking, light exercise
- Reciting affirmations
- Reviewing your goals
- Setting your intention for the day

Your morning routine helps you clarify how you want to spend your precious time and energy. You know from the outset what your priorities are and you are equipped to enter the day positive and empowered.

MIDDAY RESETS: INTERRUPT THE STRESS CYCLE

But no matter how well your morning routine sets the tone for your day, life is going to life. You will encounter traffic, angry clients, work demands, illnesses, and family emergencies. When you feel your jaw tightening or your heart rate rising, soft living requires a pattern interruption. Implementing micro practices throughout the day keeps the stress from compounding and overwhelming your nervous system. Build in mid-day resets like:

Travers, Mark PhD, (2024). 3 Reasons Why the “Soft Life” Movement Is So Empowering. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/social-instincts/202407/3-reasons-why-the-soft-life-movement-is-so-empowering>

Tukuafu, Eva LCSW, (2026). What is the Soft Life Trend and Is It Really New? LifeStance Health. <https://lifestance.com/blog/what-is-soft-life-how-therapy-can-help/>



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WHERE HERITAGE LIVES: *Salwa Petersen* ON HOME, RITUAL, AND THE POWER OF LINEAGE

For some women, home is a place. For others, it is something carried quietly within them through memory, ritual, and the stories passed from one generation to the next.

For **Salwa Petersen**, home begins in northern Chad, in the quiet rhythms of the Sahel and in the circle of women who gathered to share knowledge, care, and ancestral ritual. Those early experiences, watching her great-grandmother lead the sacred Chébé hair ritual, became the foundation for a life that would eventually span continents, cultures, and industries.

Educated at **La Sorbonne, Harvard, and HEC Paris**, and with years of experience at **L'Oréal**, Salwa built the global haircare brand **Chéribé** from something far deeper than a business idea. At its heart is an heirloom tradition preserved within her family for generations and rooted in the belief that beauty rituals are expressions of dignity, patience, and identity.

Today, Salwa's work bridges past and present honoring the women of Chad who preserved the Chébé ritual while creating economic opportunity, sustainable development, and a new model for ethical luxury in the beauty industry.

In this conversation, Salwa reflects on lineage, movement, and what it truly means to come home - to our values, our heritage, and ourselves.



You've lived many chapters in your life already, from growing up in northern Chad, to studying at Harvard and the Sorbonne, to building a beauty brand rooted in ancestral ritual. When you look back, how do you connect the little girl you were with the woman you are today?

The little girl I was never left. She was observant, grounded, and deeply connected to the women around her: watching their rituals, listening to their stories, absorbing the silence of the Sahel at dawn. Everything I am now is an extension of her, just with more tools. La Sorbonne gave me intellectual rigor, Harvard gave me frameworks, L'Oréal gave me industry mastery, HEC Paris gave me entrepreneurial discipline, but the conviction that what my family carried was extraordinary was always there.

I never had to search for my identity. My family gave me that early: a deep pride in where I come from and an unwavering sense of self. I can recite my lineage back to the 12th century. That grounding is the most valuable inheritance I have ever received, and I make sure to pass it on to my daughter.

The ritual of Chébé was practiced within your family long before it became widely known. What did those moments look like, and what did they represent beyond hair care?

It was never "hair care" in the modern sense. It was a gathering – a circle of women, led by my great-grandmother Chéréye, where knowledge was transmitted

"We each must begin with ourselves first to be truly good for others."

through hands, stories, and presence. It was intimacy, trust, and a form of beauty that was spiritual rather than aesthetic. One woman tending to another and saying, without words: I see you. You matter.

Nothing was taught as instruction. It was absorbed. You learned by watching, by being corrected gently, by listening to the stories woven into the ritual.

Two things shaped me profoundly. First, the belief that caring for your hair is caring for yourself. Not vanity, but dignity and self-respect. Second, patience. Chébé cannot be rushed. That philosophy guided how I built Chéribé: no shortcuts, no compromises, long-term thinking. I spent eight years in research and development before we launched.

In my community, a woman's hair tells a story of health, discipline, lineage, and the love invested in her. And in a world that has often diminished Black women's features and natural hair, the Chadian tradition stands as a quiet, powerful counter-narrative. We have always known our deep skin tone is beautiful and our hair is magnificent.





Chéribé is rooted in care, intention, and impact. What was the original spark that led you to create the brand?

My great-grandmother entrusted me with the last heirloom Chébé seeds – the original lineage, long extinct everywhere else. Receiving them came with an unspoken responsibility: do something worthy of this.

When I entered the beauty industry at L'Oréal, I realized two things. Millions of women were struggling with breakage, slow growth, and length-retention challenges; and the solution already existed in what I had been given. At the same time, Chébé was entering the Western market in diluted, inauthentic forms, with no connection to the original seeds or the women who preserved the ritual.

I knew that if I did not act, the ingredient's legacy would be defined by imitations. I had the authentic source, the heritage, and the training to build it correctly. Chéribé was not a business idea – it was an obligation to my lineage.

That journey led to the Chébé Complex™: a 100 % natural proprietary extract born from those heirloom seeds and reimagined through modern science in our Parisian lab. It took years and dozens of reformulations to honor the ritual while delivering the performance women deserve. Every drop is still

single-source from our farm in Chad. The technology is new. The soul is ancient.

I also knew from the start that I wanted to democratize luxury salon-quality haircare – to make it accessible to every woman, regardless of her budget. Excellence should not be a privilege. That conviction guides every decision we make.

You've created meaningful economic opportunities for women in Chad and supported sustainable development across the Sahel. Why was it important to you that Chéribé's impact extend beyond the product itself?

Because the product is the impact. The seeds come from our family's land, stewarded for millennia. The women who harvest and process them are part of the same community that preserved this knowledge. To extract value without returning it would betray everything the ritual stands for.

Vertical integration – from farm to shelf – is not a strategy for us. It is an ethical imperative. Every bottle sold sustains livelihoods, preserves biodiversity, and keeps ancestral knowledge alive. We employ Chadian women in our workshop and pay up to five times the local minimum salary. We support conservation through African Parks. These are not add-ons. They are the architecture of the brand.

What does "home" look like for the women you work with in Chad, and how does economic stability and dignity play a role in creating a sense of home?

"We each must begin with ourselves first to be truly good for others."





In the Sahel, stability is fragile. Climate, conflict, and displacement are constant pressures. For many women, home is something they build and protect daily. When a woman earns her own income, she gains agency – over her children’s education, their food, their future and her own. Economic dignity does not just improve life; it anchors it. It turns a place into a home.

Chadian women are resilient, rooted, and quietly powerful. They hold families together. They preserve traditions. When Chéribé creates economic opportunity, it does not change who they are – it simply gives them the stability to fully be who they already are.

You’ve described yourself as a modern-day nomad. How has movement and travel influenced your idea of home?

I have lived across all five continents and in a dozen countries. I have traveled to over a hundred, and I speak six languages fluently. But the truth is, being a nomad is not something I chose – it is something I inherited. I am Dazagarè and come from the Gorane, nomadic people of the Sahel and original inhabitants of Central Sahara. Movement is in my blood. I simply took it to a global scale.

Home, for me, has never been a single place – it is a feeling. The smell of incense. Daily prayers. My daughter’s laughter. My relationship to God. A meal shared with loved ones. A moment of stillness after a long day.

Movement taught me that home is portable. You carry it in your heart, your rituals, your language, your people. I recreate it wherever I go.

How do you intentionally create calm or comfort in your home when life feels demanding?

Scent, silence, and order. I burn Chadian incense blended by my mother – it transports me instantly. I need my space to be clean, minimal, and fragrant. When my environment is calm, my mind follows.

I also protect my mornings. Every day, I wake at the blue hour, when everything is still and anything feels possible. Before emails, calls, or the rhythm of family life, I need a few moments that belong only to me. That is where I reset.

How does your home reflect who you are in this season of your life?

It reflects someone in motion, but deeply rooted. My husband’s German and Danish heritage and my Chadian and French influences blend naturally – four cultures under one roof. The Danish brings warmth and clean design, the German brings function and efficiency, the Chadian brings soul and craftsmanship, the French brings refinement. It works because all four share a reverence for simplicity and intention.

Our home is filled with pieces that carry meaning: an ancient kilim, the jewelry box that held the heirloom Chébé seeds for over a decade before we replanted them on the ancestral land, baskets woven by royal house artisans from Abéché, colorful handmade fans by the Mbororo women of Lake Chad, 19th-century camel bells, pottery from Gaoui. A Danish design chair sits beside a Chadian rug. The lamp above the dining table is Danish. Family photographs line the walls alongside watercolors painted by my daughter. Nothing is decorative for decoration’s sake – everything has a story or a function.

My office is my command center. The walls are covered in brand imagery, product photography, and press – including our American Vogue feature, when they traveled to Chad with me, visited our farm, and captured the Chébé ritual firsthand. There is an evolving moodboard that reflects whatever I am working on at the moment, vintage baskets, and shelves of books on art, history, and business. A gallery of photographs from our farm and our proprietary technology lines the lab corner, where formulations are tested and refined. A hundred-year-old traditional mortar sits in the room – it has crushed Chébé for generations. A few of the over forty awards Chéribé has won since launch are on display. The brand is not built somewhere else and managed from here. It is built here.

Years ago, my friend Lichelle Silvestry, an American interior designer in Paris, introduced me to the idea of “instant home wherever I go” – a few intentional objects, a few rituals, and you are anchored. I recognized it immediately: my people, the nomads of the Sahel and central Sahara, have practiced this



especially after the world has pulled you in every direction.

Professionally, I am building a hundred-year brand. I come from a culture that thinks in centuries. I want Chéribé to prove that you can build something global without erasing where it came from; that excellence and integrity can coexist.

Personally, I want my daughter to know her mother built something real – not just successful, but honest. And I want the women in Chad to know they were never invisible. They were always the beginning.

Chad is the cradle of humankind, home to over 8,000 years of rock art depicting beauty rituals and flourishing civilizations. We come from deep history. Chéribé is simply one more chapter in a very long story.

since forever. It was not a new concept – it was an ancient one, reframed. I simply embraced what was already mine. I bring fresh flowers home from the farmers’ market every week. It keeps the space alive. And we do not save our finest linen or tableware for special occasions. Having a home and sharing a meal with the people you love is the occasion. We celebrate that every day.

My home is honest. It is not curated for anyone else. It is where I land and prepare for what comes next.

What is your favorite room in your home, and why?

Our terrace, living room, kitchen, and dining room form one open, cross-through space, flooded with light from both sides – and that openness is my favorite “room.” It is where everything converges. I read, take calls, and work. My daughter plays. We pray, cook, host close friends and family, watch movies, draw, and do homework. It is where I braid my daughter’s hair, and where my mother or sisters braid mine when they visit. I have already begun teaching her the Chébé ritual with the Chéribé products – the same way my great-grandmother taught me. Not with instructions, but with presence. She watches my hands lovingly combing her tailbone-length hair. She asks questions. Chadian braids are gentle on the scalp – she falls asleep on my lap while I braid her hair. One day, she will do this for her own daughter, and the line will continue.

My mother composed a lullaby for me as a baby, in Dazaga, praising the beauty of her daughter. When she hums it while braiding my hair wherever we are, I am home.

We cook Chadian meals with spices blended by my maternal grandmother. We brew tea and coffee from our family farm. Drinking something grown on your own land, thousands of miles away, is its own kind of homecoming.

That space holds the most versions of us in a single day. It is where we are most ourselves – and we protect it. Not everyone is invited in. Home is where you are unguarded.

What does coming home mean to you, and what kind of legacy do you hope to leave, both personally and professionally?

Coming home means returning to yourself (your values, your people, your truth)

One item in your home you couldn’t part with?

My Chadian incense burner.

Music you love having on while you’re at home?

Silence – and the sound of my family. My mother humming my lullaby while braiding my hair. My siblings giggling. My husband and father debating a chess move. My daughter’s laughter.

Are you more of a host or a homebody?

Homebody.

City you feel most yourself in?

N’Djaména.

One word that describes how you want people to feel when they use Chéribé?

Named & Claimed.



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PURPOSE

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PURPOSE

Exploring faith, creativity, identity, and meaning

Home is where our deepest values take shape. It is where faith is practiced in quiet moments, creativity finds room to breathe, and identity grows into something more fully expressed.

In this section, writers reflect on how home becomes a space for meaning and transformation. Through art, spirituality, intentional design, and sacred routines, these stories explore how creating environments that reflect our values can guide us back to purpose and remind us that the life we are building begins right where we are.



SPIRITUALITY, IDENTITY, ALIGNMENT AND MEANING

*How Our Home Reflects My Faith, Values, and
Love For Others*

BY JUDITH BREWER

“Exhale! Enjoy! Relax! Create!”

A Home That Tells Our Story

Our home from the front door to the back, from downstairs to upstairs, from the north walls to the south walls, and throughout every room tells people who I am and the things I value most. My husband lets me design and create, so it's full of flowers, mostly my favorite red roses. It is nice being surrounded by such beauty, but I try not to overwhelm my man with too many flowers. Each room is full of color, with basic tan throughout the home. I have one wall in my office that is dedicated to our children. Each frame has an up-to-date picture, a baby picture, and a card displaying the meaning of their name. Circled around that son or daughter's picture frame is their spouse, and children with the same display of pictures and name cards. Being a long-distance grandmother, it does my heart good to see these pictures every day, since I typically only have the pleasure of seeing them in person once, maybe twice a year. I also have a dedicated wall in the dining room for extended family, which includes ancestors as well.

We have opened our home to people in need - immediate family, nephews, nieces, cousins, even an elderly church member, because it is a warm, safe, secure environment. The guest rooms are always available to weary travelers needing to rest overnight or longer. When you extend the love of God, He blesses you abundantly.

My Sacred Space

There is, however, one particular space in which I pray, create, ponder, cry, meditate, and entertain. It is a space full of color and flowers, of course, with comfortable furniture and lots of fresh air breezing through which helps create a peaceful atmosphere. It is a three-season sunroom that my wonderful husband built for me a few years ago. He really scored big points with this one. This room is perfect for many things, but what tops the list is of the utmost importance to me - my prayer space. Each day early in the morning, the Lord leads me through lots of decision making: how to handle difficult business situations when necessary; how to deal with awkward moments in our marriage; what book topic to write about next; how to

give a friend constructive criticism; how to be content with being a long-distance grandmother; and much, much more. We have held business meetings, praise dance practices, small intimate dinners, and large church dinners in this wonderful space.



A Place to Exhale

Our whole home in general is a very peaceful, comfortable place to live, but my special room supersedes all. When most people step into the room, their reaction is “AWWW.” Immediately they exhale, settle in, then do not want to leave. Whatever challenges they had been having that day seem to at least temporarily leave. It is a space where everybody feels at home. I have had family members as well as friends needing to get all sorts of things that are personal to them off their chest. Family matters, marriage and dating concerns, parenting challenges, and workplace turmoil are just a few of the topics that have been discussed. I usually just listen and let them vent, cry or whatever they need. I have always been a good listener and a trusted confidante with private information, so this room adds just what is needed. Since this is where I pray fervently, the spirit of God dwells there, so that explains the beautiful calmness and peaceful atmosphere. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is peace. You can also put your feet up, lay back and relax, watch television, read, or just enjoy the silence of the moment.

A Retreat at Home

My special blessed space is decorated with a Dominican Republic/Hilton Head Island Resort feel in mind, complete with seashells and vivid color designs. It typically holds about 15 live plants and is lined with flower-filled lights around the ceiling, which at night give an atmosphere with a soothing ambience. The ceiling fan and heater allow us to enjoy our space through most weather conditions, including rainy days.

Birds can be heard singing, and you can watch the squirrels, rabbits, and chipmunks run and play. Our German Shepherd Husky mix likes the big backyard and keeps all of the critters busy. Most summers I have a vegetable garden, which enhances my relaxation. What a wonderful thing it is to plant a seed, nurture it, watch it grow, and then enjoy the sweet savory, chemical-free fruits or vegetables, when of course, the critters leave some for us to harvest and share with others.

Waiting for Spring

When the harsh winter season is upon us, I close my space and patiently wait for the beautiful spring weather to return once again. I believe my husband knew I not only wanted this room, but I needed it as well. If everyone had a place this therapeutic in which to retreat, regroup, and pray, I am sure this world would be a much better place.

Begin to imagine an area that makes you happy, with whatever you enjoy. Creating does not have to be expensive. Thrift stores and garage sales are perfect places to explore for items to begin putting together a personal space that you value. When you go home from a busy day at work, a crowded mall, a troubled friend's house, etc., you will be glad to experience your precious “me-time” in your very own private part of this big world. Exhale! Enjoy! Relax! Create! 





From House to Haven

Why Designing a Life That Really Matters Starts at Home

BY QUEEN

When Home Holds Responsibility More Than Rest

For many women, home is the place they return to but not always the place where they fully rest. It is functional, maintained, and often centered around responsibility. Women are frequently conditioned to hold everything together, creating warmth for others even when they themselves feel quietly depleted.

Yet research continues to affirm what many women intuitively understand: your environment shapes your well-being. According to the American Psychological Association (2020), chronic stress within one's living environment can negatively impact both emotional and physical health, while spaces that promote safety and calm support resilience and regulation.

The Moment Awareness Begins

At some point, a more meaningful question begins to surface, not simply how a home looks, but how it feels to live inside it.

You may notice moments when your nervous system feels braced even in familiar rooms, or that peace arrives briefly before slipping away. This awareness is not a sign of dissatisfaction; it is often the beginning of discernment. A house becomes a haven not when it is perfected, but when it is emotionally safe.

Coming Home to Yourself

Coming home begins internally. It starts when you give yourself permission to stop performing stability and begin cultivating it. Honoring your need for quiet, boundaries, and truth can subtly transform the atmosphere around you. The walls may not move, but the experience of living within them does. There is more breath. More room. Less vigilance.

The Emotional Architecture We Carry

Design conversations often focus on aesthetics, color palettes, textures, lighting, yet the emotional architecture you inhabit matters just as deeply. Consider the unspoken rules you carry or the roles you may have long outgrown. When these internal structures go unquestioned, no amount of renovation creates lasting peace. When you realign with who you are becoming, however, the space around you begins to respond.

Psychologist Dr. Sherrie Bourc Carter (2012) notes that restorative environments are not defined by perfection but by the way they support emotional recovery and nervous system regulation. In other words, sanctuary is less about appearance and more about experience.

Home as a Relationship

Home is ultimately a relationship, not with objects, but with yourself. It invites honest reflection. Does your life reflect who you are becoming, or only who you once needed to be? Does your environment support your wellbeing, or quietly require you to remain on edge? Are you truly resting, or merely existing?

Redefining Success in Midlife

For many women in midlife and beyond, these questions carry profound significance. This season often brings an invitation to release identities built around endurance and constant usefulness, redefining success to include calm, spaciousness, authenticity, and integrity.

When Haven Becomes Reality

When you begin living from this place, your home naturally follows. It becomes less of a showpiece and more of a sanctuary, one that mirrors your inner alignment rather than your external expectations.

A haven is not curated. It is claimed.

And it begins the moment you decide you no longer have to leave yourself at the door. 

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Stress in America: A National Mental Health Crisis*. <https://www.apa.org>

Bourc Carter, S. (2012). *High-Octane Women: How Superachievers Can Avoid Burnout*. Prometheus Books.



From Survival Mode to Sanctuary

How Making Art at Home
Led Me Back to Myself

BY BRITTANY CHRISTINA

How creativity, intention, and design turned my home into a place of healing—and purpose

There was a season when my home felt less like a refuge and more like a place I collapsed into at the end of the day. I would drop my keys, sit in silence, and wonder how I could be so exhausted while technically being “fine.” Nothing was falling apart on the outside. Bills were paid. Life was moving forward. But internally, I was running on fumes—burned out, grieving versions of myself I no longer recognized, and navigating transitions I hadn’t planned for.

For many Black women, survival mode is not an exception—it’s a way of life. You learn early how to be resilient, adaptable, and dependable. You learn how to carry responsibility well, how to make things work even when you’re tired, how to show up polished while holding weight no one sees. And while that strength has sustained generations, it often comes at a cost.



Eventually, the body speaks. The mind slows down. The spirit asks for more than endurance. That was the moment my relationship with home began to change.

When Survival Is No Longer Enough

Leaving my last job wasn’t part of a carefully mapped plan. I was burnt out, mistreated, undervalued, and creatively stifled. Yet I felt a clear nudge to leave—and once I did, I never looked back. There was no backup plan waiting for me, only a deep knowing that staying would cost me more than leaving ever could.

The week after I quit, my hands went to work.

I built my first piece of furniture—a console table—in my home. I didn’t do it for an audience or a launch. I did it because I needed to make something solid after everything had felt uncertain. That table, created in the quiet aftermath of burnout, would later go viral again and again. But in that moment, it wasn’t about visibility. It was about survival giving way to creation.

Art Came Before Answers

Long before furniture, my healing started on canvas.

Canvas art was where my burnout landed first. I painted what I couldn’t yet articulate—layers of color, tension, softness, and repetition. Some pieces were bold. Others were restrained. All of them were honest. Creating art became the only way I could regulate my nervous system when words felt insufficient.

Then came paint—on walls this time. I began repainting rooms not because they “needed” it, but because I did. Color became a form of control in a season where so much felt out of my hands. I chose neutral tones where my mind needed rest. Depth where I needed grounding. I wasn’t following trends; I was responding to my body.

Furniture followed naturally. I couldn’t find pieces that felt



like who I was becoming, so I made them. Sculptural forms. Intentional proportions. Objects that felt strong without being harsh. Pillows came last—softness, texture, and detail layered in once my space felt steady again.

What I didn’t realize at the time was that I wasn’t just decorating.

I was rebuilding myself—one creative act at a time.

Making as a Form of Healing

Burnout doesn’t live only in your thoughts. It lives in your body.

The repetition of brush strokes, the physicality of building furniture, the focus required to design something from scratch—all of it slowed my breathing and brought me back into myself. Making became my form of regulation. Not therapy in a clinical sense, but therapy all the same.

It’s no coincidence that creative expression is often linked to emotional well-being. According to the American Art Therapy Association, engaging in art-making can help people process stress, regulate emotions, and improve overall mental health. When you create, you’re not just producing something—you’re releasing something too.



My home became the place where my nervous system could finally exhale.

Every room reflected a season. The art on the walls wasn’t décor—it was evidence. Evidence of what I had survived. Evidence of what I was learning to trust. My DNA is embedded in my home quite literally. Each piece carries memory, emotion, and intention.

Why Sanctuary Matters

Your environment does more than hold your belongings—it shapes how you feel. Research has shown that housing environments can influence emotional well-being and a sense of psychological safety (Riva, 2022). When your surroundings are chaotic, your nervous system often follows. When your space supports calm, clarity becomes more accessible.

This is why sanctuary matters. Creating a sanctuary isn't about perfection. It's about intention. It's about designing a space that works *with* you instead of against you. A space that allows you to rest, reflect, and restore—not just exist between obligations.

As my home softened, so did I. As my space became more intentional, my boundaries followed. I stopped creating from urgency and started creating from alignment.

When Healing Finds Its Direction

At some point, quietly and without strategy, people began asking questions.

Where did you get that table?
Who made that piece?

Why does your home feel like a gallery instead of just a living space?

Without realizing it at first, I had begun turning my home into a personal art gallery. Not in a precious or untouchable way, but in a lived-in, conversational one. Every piece told a story. Every room held intention. The furniture, the artwork, the pillows—they weren't just decorative objects. They were conversation starters. Reflections. Invitations.

My home wasn't styled to impress—it was curated to express.

Friends didn't just notice the pieces; they felt the energy of the space. They lingered. They asked questions. They saw themselves in it. What I had created for myself—out of necessity, out of healing—was resonating beyond my walls.

That's when it became clear: what began as art therapy had evolved into purpose.

I didn't start with a business plan. I started with a need to feel whole again. But as my home became a gallery of my healing, it also became the blueprint for my brand. The same belief guided both: that home should be expressive, personal, and layered with meaning.

Eventually, that belief took shape as my home décor business—built on the idea that your space can tell your story, spark conversation, and feel deeply personal. Not as a pivot, but as a continuation.

The business was never the point. Healing was.

The business simply grew from that place.

Coming Home Fully

Spring is often described as a season of renewal, but it's also a season of remembering. Remembering who you are when you're no longer in survival mode. Remembering that rest and beauty are not rewards—you don't have to earn them.

If you've been tired, overwhelmed, or disconnected, know this: your home can become an ally. You don't need a perfect plan or a dramatic transformation. You need permission to create a space that reflects who you are now.

Start small. A canvas. A corner. A color that brings you peace.

These are not minor acts. They are gestures of care. Of reclamation. Of alignment.

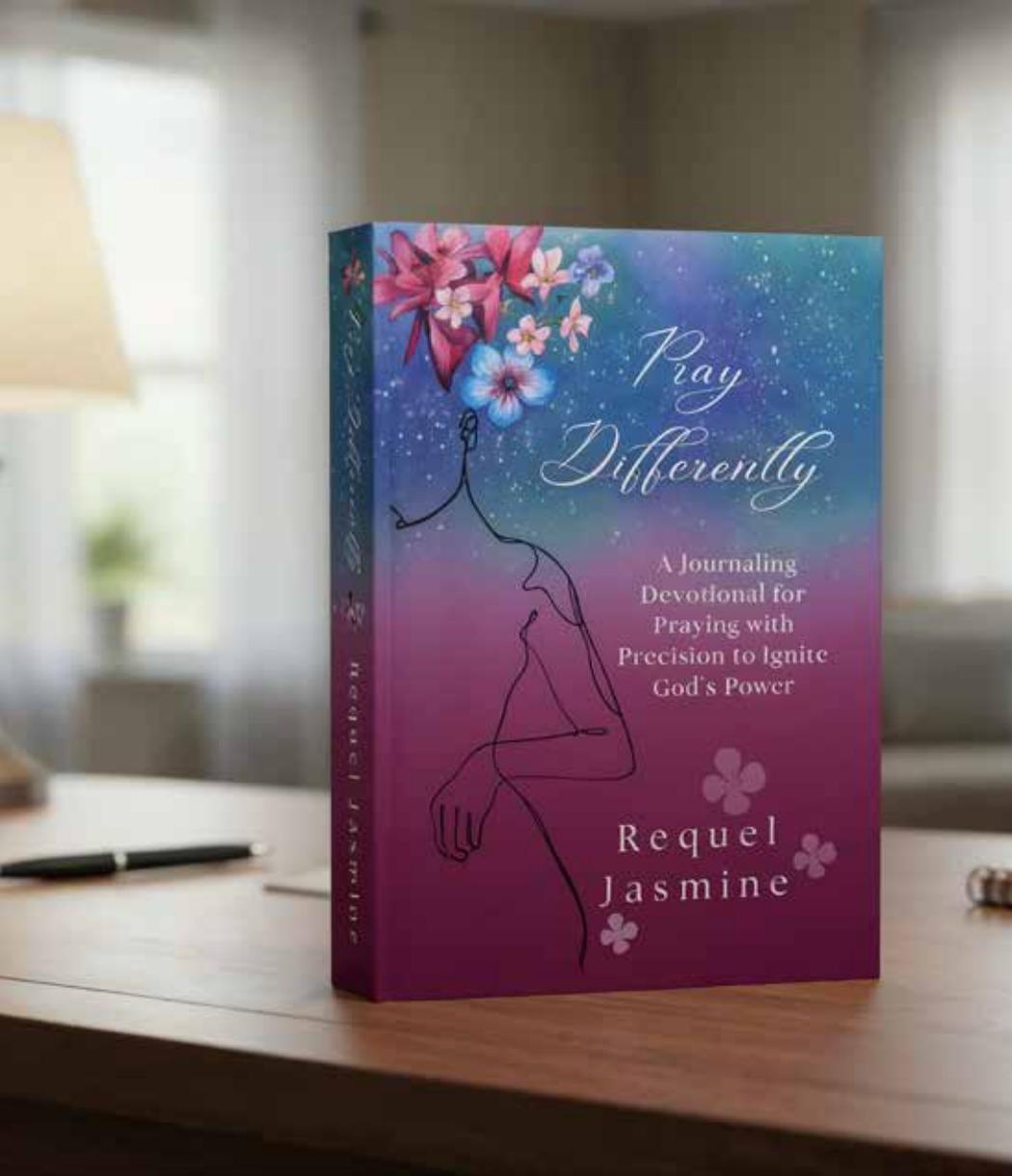
And sometimes, when you listen closely to what your hands are making, you'll realize they're leading you exactly where you're meant to go. 



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His Space

Creating a Sacred Corner to Lay It All Down

BY REQUEL JASMINE

Born From Necessity

In the closing pages of my devotional journal, *Pray Differently: Praying with Precision to Ignite God's Power*, I included a quiet bonus section titled *His Space*. It was an invitation, a gentle nudge toward creating a place dedicated solely for you and the Father to dwell. Not ornate. Not expansive. Simply intentional. Sacred because He meets you there.

What I did not fully explain in those pages is that *His Space* was born from necessity. From days when life felt heavy and unbearable. From evenings when I returned home carrying the invisible weight of expectations, disappointments, and emotions I could no longer hold upright. I needed somewhere to go.

Building the Secret Place

On Sunday mornings, the altar at church was that sacred place. But on ordinary weekdays, in the privacy of my home, I created another altar, one tucked into the corner of my bedroom.

It was not a large space. Just a small corner in my two-bedroom, one-bathroom condo the Lord had blessed me with. Yet within that modest boundary, I curated something holy: a soft blanket spread across the floor, my journal and pen within reach, sometimes a candle, always quiet.

That corner became my refuge.

There, I could finally exhale.

There, I could take the armor off.

There, I could remove the mask.

There, I could be spiritually naked and unashamed before God fully seen, fully known, fully held.



Dwelling in the Secret Place

"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust." — Psalm 91:1–2 (KJV)

Scripture speaks of dwelling in the "secret place," yet that dwelling looks different for each of us. For some, it is the solitude of an evening shower. For others, the long stretch of highway during a daily commute. But my secret place was not found; it was built intentionally, lovingly. A corner transformed into an altar.

Night after night, I would sit on that blanket, wrap myself in its softness, and close my eyes. I was not simply unpacking the day I was returning it. Every conversation. Every failure. Every ache. Every moment I felt incompetent or unworthy. I placed them, one by one, back into God's hands.

Where Pretense Dissolves

In that secret place, pretense dissolved. There was no space for performative worship, only genuine surrender. The kind that allows the soul to be uncovered and unashamed before its Maker.

Sometimes I prayed.

Sometimes I journaled.

Sometimes I cried without words.

And always, He met me there.

The Power of Designated Space

There is a quiet power in dedicating physical space for spiritual encounter. When we designate even the smallest

corner as sacred, we teach our souls to recognize: This is where I come to lay it all down. Over time, the space begins to hold memories of surrender, of healing, of communion. It becomes less about décor and more about dwelling.

To dwell is not merely to intend; it is to return consistently. To abide is to keep showing up without answers, without resolution, without spiritual performance. Dwelling is the steady practice of trust. Each time we enter our secret place, we are declaring that God truly is our refuge and our fortress, the calm within every storm of life.



Create It. Enter It. Dwell There.

You do not need much room to create *His Space*. A chair beside your bed. A folded blanket on the floor. A place by the window where morning light rests. Holiness does not require square footage; it responds to invitation.

What matters is intention, the decision that somewhere within the walls of your everyday life, there exists a place where you are allowed to be undone and remade in God's presence.

My bedroom corner still reminds me: I never had to carry it alone. Not the weariness. Not the questions. Not the hidden grief. I could always return to that sacred square of softness and release the day into the One who was already holding me.

Your secret place may look different. But it is waiting to be named, to be claimed, to be set apart.

Create it.
Enter it.
Dwell there.

Because sometimes the most powerful altar you will ever kneel at is the one you build at home.

You're burned out because your success has secretly become your survival.

But what if your level of success didn't **require more, but less?**

- ▶ **Less Adrenaline**
More Alignment
- ▶ **Less Performance**
More Power
- ▶ **Less Pressure**
More Peace

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POP CULTURE

Examining how culture reflects our evolving ideas of home

Culture has always reflected the spaces we long for. In recent years, our collective imagination has shifted toward something softer: calmer homes, quieter lives, and environments that offer refuge from constant noise and pressure.

This section looks at how pop culture, media, and social trends are reshaping the way we think about home. From television characters who rebuild their lives after chaos to the rise of cozy aesthetics and the growing fatigue with curated perfection, these pieces explore why our culture is increasingly drawn to homes that feel real, restorative, and deeply human.

The Soft Home Era: Why Culture Is Craving Calm, Cozy and Grounded

BY CINDY KUMAR

When Success Stopped Looking Loud

There's a noticeable shift happening in how women are defining success.

Homes feel quieter. Routines feel slower. The loud, hyper-productive energy that dominated the last decade is softening. The aesthetic might look like candles, neutral tones, oversized sweaters and slow mornings, but this isn't really about design.

It's about nervous systems.

The Era When Busyness Proved Worth

For years, ambition had a certain look. It was visible. It was fast. It was intense. The busier you were, the more credible you seemed. Especially for women building careers or businesses, intensity became proof.

Proof you were serious.
Proof you were capable.
Proof you could handle it.





I spent nine years working inside firms before starting my own practice. Everything was structured and high-performance. You were measured on responsiveness, output and composure. There was an unspoken understanding that looking calm while managing pressure was part of the job.

When I left and started building my own business, I carried that pace with me. I thought growth had to feel overwhelming to be legitimate. If my calendar was full, I felt productive. If it wasn't, I felt uneasy. If I wasn't pushing, I questioned whether I was falling behind.

When Movement Isn't Strategy

No one told me to operate that way. It was just embedded.

But building something of your own forces you to examine your operating system. And what I started to realize is that urgency feels productive, but it doesn't always produce durable results.

There's a difference between movement and strategy.

Your Guide to Hope, Wellness & Wealth

The Cultural Turn Toward Regulation

Around the same time, culturally, something shifted. Women stopped glamorizing burnout. Instead, conversations started centering around regulation, boundaries and designing environments that support clarity rather than overstimulation.

That's what the Soft Home Era represents.

It isn't about opting out of ambition. It's about anchoring it.

There's an interesting cultural comparison in what people jokingly refer to as the "Adam Sandler Era." *Adam Sandler* is worth hundreds of millions of dollars and routinely shows up in basketball shorts and oversized hoodies, even at high-profile events. He does not look curated. He does not look like he's trying to impress anyone.

And no one questions his success.

For a long time, many ambitious women felt like they had to perform competence constantly. Perform growth. Perform momentum. The polish became part of the proof.

The Cost of Performing Success

But performance is expensive. It consumes so much energy. It keeps your nervous system activated. It can distract from the more important work of building margin, building reserves and building stability.

As more women become financially literate, that cost becomes clearer. When you understand your break-even point and your cash flow timing, you stop confusing hustle with growth. You begin to see that adrenaline spikes revenue but rarely sustains profit.

When Financial Clarity Redefines Luxury

Financial clarity changes what feels impressive.

It shifts luxury away from spectacle and toward steadiness.

Luxury becomes not scrambling at month-end.

Luxury becomes not fearing tax season. Luxury becomes having savings. Luxury becomes being able to say no without panic.

That shift shows up visually in how women

are designing their homes and routines. A grounded home is not escapism. It reflects a desire for control in a world that feels volatile.

The last few years have included economic uncertainty, remote work transitions, inflation and constant exposure to curated success online. The collective nervous system is fatigued.

Why Calm Environments Are Strategic

Calm environments are not indulgent. They are strategic.

A regulated nervous system makes better financial decisions. It negotiates differently. It prices differently. It evaluates opportunities differently. It builds for sustainability instead of applause.

I am still building. My business is not a finished product. I am refining systems, adjusting strategy and learning in real time. But one thing I am actively unlearning is the belief that ambition has to feel chaotic.

Adrenaline vs. Regulation

Adrenaline builds quickly. Regulation builds sustainably.

Adrenaline looks impressive. Regulation creates durability.

The Power of Quiet Control

The Soft Home Era is not about shrinking ambition. It's about removing unnecessary performance from it.

It's women realizing that control is quieter than hustle, but far more powerful.

In an overstimulated world, calm can look passive. It isn't.

Calm is intentional. Calm is disciplined. Calm is financially aware.

And when calm is paired with clarity, it becomes one of the strongest foundations you can build from. 

“Performance is expensive. It consumes so much energy.”



Jill Scott
Photo courtesy
of Shutterstock

Restructuring Home After Chaos

A Psychological and reflective ode to Sheila of *Why Did I Get Married?*

BY ARDENNA DOWNING

Discomfort as Catalyst

Almost twenty years ago the movie, *Why Did I Get Married?* was released followed by *Why Did I Get Married Too?* a few years later. These popular movies garnered a lot of attention, highlighting the complicated nature of married relationships; following the storylines of multiple couples navigating a myriad of issues including infidelity, abuse, and grief.

One beloved character of this movie franchise is Sheila, played by Jill Scott, who has one of the biggest transformations of everyone. She stands out physically as a larger woman, and is constantly humiliated in private and in public. Her initial presence on the screen draws in the viewer with her aura of sweetness, naivete and glimpses of her pain. We first feel her presence vividly with an emphasis on her size and weight on an airplane where she endures an insensitive husband and uncomfortable passengers. Discomfort for Sheila is a common theme in the *Why Did I Get Married?* franchise.

Discomfort sometimes keeps us curious, motivated, and can even empower us. Sometimes though, discomfort can influence tolerance, disengagement, and instability. When used for our benefit, discomfort can inspire us to make better, healthier choices when we are ready. To meet ourselves in a better place literally and figuratively, sometimes we have to take our experiences with discomfort as an opportunity to transition and transform our inner and outer homes. Sheila's story of discomfort is painful, while also inspiring the message that those who stay the course of fighting for themselves can persevere.

*“Discomfort
sometimes
keeps us
curious,
motivated,
and can even
empower us.”*

When Home Is Unsafe

Sheila represents the multilayered dynamics of women who have experienced abuse within their physical homes and bravely restart their lives in new environments to find peace. Sheila's body is also a metaphor of this transformation. Sometimes our “homes,” as in our bodies, are in disarray. Carrying the stress, trauma, and negative manifestations of abusive relationships can certainly impact both homes. Survivors of abuse can exhibit characteristics such as low self-esteem, family and social isolation, economic and emotional insecurity, along with inferiority (Esteves Pereira et al., 2020).

In the first movie, Sheila's husband tells her that she can have the rental property in a rough neighborhood, a property that they can put “bars” on. She has no value to him in her physical body and he is offering her the worst in property as well. He also takes their joint money and turns off her phone, stripping her of resources. Women experience larger economic declines with abusive relationships compared to their other relationships (Adams et al., 2024). When we are in deficit and without resources, we tend to be more vulnerable. Vulnerability though can be a source of empowerment and strength even when it doesn't feel and seem like it.

The Power of Positive Solitude

When Sheila finally reconnects with her friends, she tells them that she has to do it on her own. When we are rebuilding and relocating literally and figuratively, there are pieces of our journey that don't include others. Sheila needed to refocus with minimal distractions, developing a necessary part of her journey called positive solitude. Positive solitude is when a person deliberately seeks experiences that are enjoyable for them; feeling connected

with themselves in a positive manner (Palgi et al., 2021). Positive solitude doesn't mean you are alone or lonely, you can be by yourself enjoying an experience with other people around (Palgi et al., 2021).

In Sheila's eventual reemergence, we witnessed "Jilly from Philly" as she expanded and rose to her new life. We see her as fierce and regulated; influenced by there being room to grow via a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment. Our environments can influence bold decisions, encouraging us to change them, even when we are in pain. We have the power to change our environments and sometimes that is enough to care about and change ourselves in the way we need to.

Reclaiming Space, Reclaiming Self

In the second movie, we see some ongoing struggles, but Sheila's new attitude, demeanor, and confidence is consistent. When her second husband experiences some transitional changes of his own during this movie, Sheila was assertive, expressing her concern with him. She addresses issues head on and freely informs him that she's not "dealing with it." She says "I'm not the same woman I used to be. I'm not the same one that can handle the disconnect," (Perry, 2010, 1:50:00). Sometimes moving forward looks and feels like fighting harder for our present and future instead of falling back into the familiarity of our past.

When we further examine her life, we realize that Sheila's storyline, at least in the first movie, doesn't technically have a home compared to everyone else. We do get a glimpse as to what home life could have been for her though. In the second movie, we come across a scene where

Mike and Sheila are alone in the vacation home's beautiful kitchen. The environment is light, airy, and open. Mike cheerfully goes down memory lane, mentioning their first apartment with green carpet and pink tile, stating that Sheila loved the kitchen and painted it orange. She corrected him, said it was yellow, explaining remembering the hole in the wall he pushed her into. She recalls the pink tile her nose bled on, not being able to get the blood cleaned. Sheila remembered the bedroom as being "very cold," with no light, feeling depressed there (Perry, 2010, 40:00).

"When we see physical beauty in our homes, it is a reflection of ourselves in a variety of ways."

Mike's perspective is faulty, a cognitive distortion. Cognitive distortions are biased, faulty beliefs and perspectives we have about ourselves, others, and the world (Beck, 1976). Denial, blame, justification and minimization are types of distortions that are used by abusive men to excuse or downplay their actions. (Holtzworth-Munroe & Hutchinson, 1993).

Mike apologized, but Sheila identified him as being her past. She told him to get out of the kitchen, commanding that environment, reclaiming safety for herself.

Our physical environments can be immaculate, but what happens inside of them can supersede the display. Image isn't enough. For instance, the physical environment where Sheila's current husband confronts her ex husband is beautiful, but the scene is a challenge to watch due to the content.

When Beauty Masks Brokenness

While we are telling Sheila's story, it is important to acknowledge the environmental journey of another character Patricia, who has also gone through a rough ending of her relationship by the end of the second movie. "Perfect Patty's" beautiful physical environment escalated into a destroyed unsafe home. While in the first movie one witnesses verbal altercations between her and her husband in their home, physical violence becomes evident by the second movie. Patty isolates herself despite the destruction around her; broken glass, and charred pictures of their son. Her home is like a tomb representing her mental and emotional state.

Sheila and Patricia's stories on the surface level are seemingly different, but there is an aura of juxtaposition as an undercurrent. Sheila's pain is front and center for the audience while Patricia's is a slow burn, almost perfectly hidden. How they experience pain in their physical environments is also different. In movie one, we witness Sheila in an unlocked hotel room where anyone could just walk in. In movie two, Patty literally locks herself inside her home. While these are noted differences, both women represent how our physical environments reflect our mental sense of safety and wellbeing.





Jill Scott
Photo courtesy
of Shutterstock

When we see physical beauty in our homes, it is a reflection of ourselves in a variety of ways. At baseline, the beauty may help us feel better. We must also not forget that what happens in these homes and our interpretations of our experiences may not match the aesthetics. Physically “cleaning up” is not enough, it is only one part of a healthy life.

Sustaining the Glow-Up

Our physical environment glow ups can be the foundation to jumpstart our journey to better overall wellness. We still have to continue to sustain it, our bodies and our psyche by being protective. Celebrate your beautiful homes, and also mentally and emotionally remember what it has taken to get there. Reflect on how your physical body reacts to this space. These are clues to where you are on your journey.

Sheila ultimately gives us a journey of hope filled with many emotional challenges and changes. We see her fight to sustain it, a reflection of her finally being able to value and care for her inner and outer home. We are just as worthy and deserving of internal and external value; we can start by using our physical environment to help guide our paths. 

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INFLUENCER FATIGUE AND THE RISE OF RELATABLE LIVING



BY CINDY KUMAR

When Sharing Became Performing

Social media started as connection.

It was a way to stay in touch, share ideas, build community. For entrepreneurs, it became a powerful marketing tool. You could speak directly to your audience, build trust, and grow a business without traditional gatekeepers.

Over time, that tool evolved.

Marketing became personal branding. Personal branding became performance. And performance became constant.

Now almost everyone feels pressure to operate like an influencer. Even professionals who simply want to market a service feel the expectation to document their life. The morning routine. The airport shot. The coffee. The dinner. The vacation. The family moment.

Being visible used to mean sharing expertise. Now it often means sharing everything.

The Cost of Constant Visibility

That shift is exhausting.

There is very little room left to simply experience your life without thinking about how it will be framed. When every moment has potential content value, presence starts to erode. Instead of living, you are observing yourself living.

That constant self-surveillance has a cost.

And I see that cost behind the scenes.

Behind the Aesthetic

In my work, I see the numbers most people do not post. I see the margins. I see the credit card balances. I see the debt servicing. I see the gap between projected lifestyle and actual liquidity.

There are people showing up online as if they have it all figured out while financing their brand image on revolving credit. There are founders scaling visibility faster than their cash flow can support. There are women exhausted from being on all the time because their identity has become their marketing strategy.

The aesthetic signals success. The balance sheet tells another story.

Why Audiences Are Pulling Back

This is where influencer fatigue begins.

It is not that audiences are tired of ambition. They are tired of illusion.

The Rise of the Intentional Audience

The last few years changed consumer psychology. Inflation, layoffs, rising interest rates, economic volatility. People became more cautious with money. More analytical. More aware.

And that awareness is changing influence.

People are becoming more intentional with who they follow. More intentional with what they buy. More intentional with where they place their trust.

Attention is no longer automatic. Spending is no longer impulsive.

Consumers are asking better questions.

Is this business stable?
Is this advice grounded in reality?
Is this lifestyle funded or financed?
Is this growth sustainable?

What Relatable Living Actually Means

That shift is driving the rise of relatable living.

Relatable does not mean unpolished.

Your Guide to Hope, Wellness & Wealth



It means honest about process. Honest about trade-offs. Honest about timelines. It means showing the mechanics behind the milestone.

Audiences want context now. They want to know how something was built, not just that it was built.

There is also a nervous system element to this fatigue.

Being on constantly is draining. When personal life and promotional life merge, there is no true off switch. You are always curating, editing, framing.

The Burnout Behind the Brand

Burnout does not always come from workload. It often comes from identity strain. When you feel pressure to perform your success rather than simply build it, you never fully rest.

Relatable living pushes back against that strain.

It says you can use social media strategically without turning your entire life into content. You can market your expertise without staging your private moments. You can build influence without sacrificing presence.

Durability Over Display

From a financial perspective, this shift is healthy.

Growth driven by optics and debt is fragile. Growth built on margin and reserves is durable.

As financial literacy increases, illusion loses power. People understand that revenue screenshots do not equal profit. That travel does not equal liquidity. That aesthetics do not equal stability.

Intentional audiences reward intentional builders.

The Next Era of Influence

The next era of influence will not belong to the loudest voice in the room. It will belong to the most credible. The ones who can speak about growth without theatrics. The ones who can admit recalibration. The ones who prioritize durability over display.

Influencer fatigue is not the end of social media.

It is the end of constant performance.

And in a culture that has blurred the line between living and branding, steadiness is starting to feel powerful again.

Not because it looks impressive.

But because it feels real. 



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