



Each time I return to my mother's house, I'm excited to see what's changed. I know that stored away are tarnished cheerleading trophies and bent Polaroids. There's a satin chiffon prom dress and a floral hatbox holding tattered college textbooks. These relics bring me comfort.



The robin egg blue walls have transitioned to pistachio. A newly thrifted stool keeps close company with embroidered linen curtains I haven't yet brushed past. The world's best chocolate-chip cookies are heaped on a fresh white cake platter that I most certainly didn't grow up with, and what was hanging on one wall has migrated to another. My mother has a reputation for mixing her interiors with abandon, and while some have criticized her unapologetic design approach, I couldn't love her more for how she periodically reinvents herself through her home.

I never gave much thought to this quirk of hers until I lost a dear friend in late 2019, and I found myself in full-blown design-coping mode. In new home, I caught myself glaring with frustration at bare walls and rugless rooms. The cold white light of builder-grade ceiling pendants made me tense. I needed comfort. I needed color. I needed the kind of calm that only a warmly and well-appointed home could bring, and so I dove headlong into magazines, Pinterest, and design boards, desperately searching for inspiration.

The term “design therapy” has always felt dismissive to me. Like “retail therapy,” design therapy carries gendered connotations that belittle the very real need to redefine our day-to-day existence in the wake of personal traumas. Some of us are more sensitive to the aesthetic of our environments than others. Perhaps I inherited this trait from my mother, or maybe aging has unlocked a deeper desire to create. Whatever happened, I found myself decorating, undecorating, and redecorating my home, not because it felt like I was supposed to, but because I needed to take control of my grief and my identity without my friend while expecting my second child. This wasn’t “design therapy.” This was experiencing design as an opportunity for identity renewal.

Chelsea Morgan, local designer and owner of Chelsea Morgan Designs, relates to what I went through. She agrees that there are so many ways to reaffirm who you are and how you interact with your space, which has become exceptionally important in this topsy-turvy world we find ourselves in.



“Our home is now more than ever an oasis, a place of refuge and relief.” said Morgan. “Carving out time to hang the artwork you bought months ago... can be immensely cathartic and provides a sense of accomplishment.”

Morgan advocates for design as renewal in little or large steps. She says that something as simple as buying yourself fresh flowers, a cozy candle, or a new coffee table to kick your feet up on at the end of a long week can add the smallest spark of joy you need to recharge your batteries. It's not about spending money frivolously for instant gratification. Rather, design as renewal can be a mindful process through which we use what we have or spend minimally for maximum satisfaction.

Meg Waldrop of Trinity Design and Build often speaks of design as a healing process. She says that even if you're not able to start the process of dramatically overhauling the interiors of your home, the simple act of saving what you love on a design board can be just as exciting and fulfilling.

For me, design as renewal is about savoring what makes me authentically happy. The concept of savoring comes from positive psychology research. People who slow down and focus on what's good in their lives report higher levels of personal satisfaction. It may be the reason why we saw letter boards take off or why we see the word "gather" printed on canvases. People need visual cues to center their identities around a message or design that reaffirms what they value most.



In my home you'll find plenty of warm brushed brass and soft throw blankets spilling over the sides of baskets, mirrors strategically placed to increase natural light and a dramatic gallery wall

capturing in black and white photos the mischievous side-eye of my toddler and the intense gaze of my baby. It's taken time to curate a home that I love, but I am profoundly happier having given myself the time and space to do so. It's therapeutic to work on this part of myself, and I know when I'm ready for a change, I can move around what I love for a fresh redesign of my life.



Jackie Hoermann-Elliott is a senior lecturer and the Assistant Director of First Year Composition at Texas Women's University. She wrote for newspapers and magazines around the Midwest before settling down in the Lone Star State. Since she moved here in 2013, she's written for *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *Indulge*, *K Magazine*, *The Dallas Morning News*, and *GuideLive*. For fun, she cheers on her husband, Billy Ryan High School coach Buck Elliott, practices yoga poses with her amazing bonus daughter, "E," runs after preschooler "B the First," and teaches with toddler "B the Second" hanging onto

her every word.

Design as Renewal

grieving

interior design

memories

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