Love the Home You Have

MELISSA MICHAELS

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For all my readers who still want to believe that fairytale castles can be found, even in the most unexpected places.
Home Is in the Heart of the Beholder

We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognizing and appreciating what we do have.

Frederick Keonig

I’ve been a house lover from as far back as I can remember. Creating beauty in a home is a little bit of heaven for me. I enjoy the simple daily rituals of keeping house. I love to light nice-smelling candles. I have fun putting around, rearranging accessories and even furniture on a regular basis. I get giddy over polished white sinks and clean counters. I regularly stop to appreciate little things around my home—how pretty my bed looks after I make it, the way the sun filters softly through my windows, how the colors of my walls flow nicely from room to room.

I take pleasure in seeing seasonal decor on my porch, pretty dishes stacked on my open kitchen shelves, and organized baskets and glass jars in my pantry. Honestly, I fall in love with my home a little bit more every day, I can imagine being content here for the rest of my life!

And that, my friend, is what I’ve discovered throughout my journey. The attitude of contentment was a life lesson I have learned over time and am still learning. And it’s the heart of this journey we are starting together.
The Big Discovery

I spent many years convinced my own dream house was the one found beyond the picket fence or behind the big iron gates. It was the one near the water or the one down the block. The big one. The small one. The charming cottage on the corner.

I tried them all, and each time I was certain it was THE ONE. Only to find it wasn’t the only one.

The dream house is here too, under this new roof of the only house I didn’t dream of or fall in love with or even consider our forever home. It’s here in the place I hang clothes and chase dust bunnies and bake cookies and wipe the muddy paws of puppies. The place I rearrange furniture and hang curtains and burn the toast.

The most important thing I’ve learned from all my dreaming, scheming, and hauling moving boxes is that we can learn to love the
Home is in the Heart of the Beholder

home we have whether it is big or small, fancy or ordinary, surrounded by white pickets or brown chain link, faced with brick or faux siding, a first apartment or a starter home in a less-than-ideal neighborhood. Home is right where you are.

As for those dreams you have about what a home should look like? They can come alive wherever you are, in any size, shape, or style of house, with all of its limitations and frustrations, once you embrace who you really are, what you love, and your own authentic style at home.

I won't try to persuade you to create a house that looks just like mine. All of our dream houses look a little bit different. This book isn't about learning to transform your home by becoming a DIY expert (unless you want to be one) or a Martha Stewart clone (unless you have a big staff). It isn't about lowering the bar of your expectations. (I think we find hope and contentment when we dream big with realistic passion!) My goal is to offer you inspiration and confidence so you can create a dream house, whatever that looks like to you. We are all unique. We all have different styles. We all have different limitations. But the formula for a house you love should work just as well whether you move to a new address or settle in and embrace the one you already have.

Fresh Beginnings Are Life's Little Remodels

Start today. You don't have to take out a loan, trade in your husband or kids (even if you're tempted to), or win the lottery before you begin. The exciting result of learning to love the home you have is this: You will find greater contentment where you are, and your home will start to inspire your life in unexpected ways.

Each of us is coming from a different place. Some women are single and living on their own, others are newly married, and still others are living in the chaos of having young kids and pets and hectic jobs. You and I might have different lives, but our shared truth is that the scenery and demands of our lives are always changing. The kind of home projects we take on or the updates we make will vary with the season we are in. Once we start working within our limitations rather than wishing
them away, we are making forward motion toward living a contented life at home. Here are three ways to jump-start your journey:

1. List three reasons you’re grateful for the home you have.
2. Start a special tradition or create a fun memory in your home.
3. Think of one area of your home you enjoy and why.

I’m here to encourage you through my own home stories and the lessons I’ve learned so you can confidently take the next step, embrace authenticity in the journey, and even delight in the unexpected twists and turns that contribute to your dream of a beautiful home and life. Right there in the home you have.

The Love Your Home Challenge

Have you ever walked into a home and right away sensed a special heart-and-soul warmth? When you engage your own personal style to transform your life within your four walls, your house becomes that kind of home. The place you live should feel like your own little cozy nest. It is your safe refuge from the world. It may not be fancy or perfect in every way, but it’s yours to nurture during this time.

The memories, the love, and the personal touches we put into our home will transform it from a basic structure to a place that actually enhances our life. The more we invest our self in each corner of our home, the more emotionally connected we become.

To inspire you in that direction, I’m inviting you to take the 31-Day Love Your Home Challenge. You’ll find this as a special section following chapter 13. You can use the challenge as you journey with me or after you’ve read the book as a way to begin using the ideas and encouragement you gather along the way. Honestly, real love doesn’t always start with a feeling, but with actions that eventually result in feelings.

Go ahead and take a peek at it right now! I’ll wait for you. Think about how you want to make the most of the challenge and its encouraging, useful prompts.
Love the Home You Have Online

To make this home-love journey as simple as possible, I want you to have a clear starting place to connect with me and find encouragement long after you turn the last page of this book. Besides reading and subscribing to my blog at theinspiredroom.net, I’ve created a special online home just for you and other readers of this book.

At lovethethehomeyouhave.com you’ll find links to helpful articles I’ve written, downloads of the printable art, quotations and resources you will find listed in this book, and a link to a special Pinterest board I set up for inspiration and support related to this book experience and your home-love journey.

Share the Love

Throughout this book you will come across some happy hand-drawn quotations—words of encouragement created for you to enjoy. When you get to these, I hope you’ll pause and take in these messages of hope. You might even find the perfect one to be your special “I love my home” motto.

Feel free to snap a pic of any of these and post, Pin, or Tweet them (#lovethethehomeyouhave) to encourage friends. As a gift to you, I’ve also placed the entire selection of quotations online at lovethethehomeyouhave.com as free downloadable prints you can use and share as much as you like. Feel free to print one that really fits your mood, your life, or your home-love status and keep it handy as your reminder to dream big, embrace what you have, and appreciate the incredible combination of mess and beauty that is your home.

At this site, you’ll also find a personal invitation to discover fun ways to share your own journey with me and other readers through becoming a part of my new interactive site called Home Love Stories (homelovestories.com). We’ll celebrate this journey together as we open up about our 31-Day Challenge experiences, share our personal home stories, and upload photos, ideas, failures, and successes. Let’s make this a great community. I can’t wait to see you there!

So let’s begin! And may this adventure inspire your love for the home you have.
Hello, Dream House

When you finally go back to your old home, you’ll find it wasn’t the old home you missed but your childhood.

Sam Ewing

I’ve always been a bit of a romantic. As a young girl, I was full of fanciful ideas about life, love, and creating a home. I imagined a fairy-tale, happily-ever-after version of life full of pretty things and extraordinary moments on ordinary Mondays. The chance to create a lovely home and a beautiful life is the one true dream I have been passionate about since my earliest memories.

My favorite thing to do as a kid (besides playing with my Barbie dream house and wallpapering the walls of cardboard-box dollhouses) was to ride in the backseat of my parents’ car for our Sunday afternoon drive-bys. We’d quietly drive up the winding driveways of the most amazing houses, past the Beware of Dog signs and security cameras, and peer through the gates to catch glimpses of the glories on the other side.

Be still my heart. I thought those beautiful homes were as majestic as fairy-tale castles. They were what my dreams were made of. I imagined that someday, somehow, I would live in a big, fancy English Tudor.

I think many of us have mental images of what life is supposed to look like. Maybe you didn’t grow up thinking you were going to be a
princess living in an English castle, but I bet you had your own version of what your grown-up world would look like.

_I am a grown-up, and somewhere along the line I stopped going into that place in my own mind where grace and casual elegance lived. Things around here are in a dismal state of affairs. Really, my life is a little past the halfway mark, and I would truly like to live some of it the way I imagined it as a little girl. You have spurred me on to reach into my past and all the dreams and wonders of how it would be when I became a grown-up._

—an Inspired Room blog reader

Perhaps your dream was planted in your mind when you were just a little girl, or maybe the ideal has been budding more recently. It may be fueled by visual tours of picture-perfect lives on Instagram, where everyone else seems to have a beautiful home with well-placed bouquets on lovely tables and no dirty laundry anywhere (unless it is actually clean and color-coordinated and then strewn about to give the space an artistic, lived-in look). Of course, we know the images are staged and filtered so the homes appear to be perfect, but still…we can't help but dream about having a home that beautiful.

There is a reason Instagram is addictive—it’s inspiring to look at. Who in their right mind wants to see pictures of anyone’s dirty laundry on the floor? No one. We don’t crave ugly or disorganized things. We want pretty. We want organized. We love to dream a little. Is that too much to ask?

Why We Long for Beauty

Where does our desire for a lovely or orderly home come from? Is it an unhealthy obsession with perfection? Not necessarily. The question is, are we experiencing the joy of creating a beautiful atmosphere at home, or are we fostering discontent by obsessing over what we don’t
The Five Gifts of Change

1. **Change creates a new beginning.** Yesterday may have been about tears, dissatisfaction, and letting go, but today is different. Change of any kind gives birth to a new beginning. Embrace the possibility with gusto.

2. **Change shifts things.** This adventure sets you on a new path and gives you a fresh vantage point. Today you are blessed with the chance to look at your life and home from a new perspective.

3. **Change calls you to action.** I have always felt that God wants to use people who are willing to move their feet. You will definitely get moving in this pursuit of a newfound love for your home. Each change you encounter will encourage and enlighten you as you walk through the next one.

4. **Change ignites your imagination.** This journey you begin today will spark your creativity. Ask yourself, “What if? What if I traded my dark curtains for light linen panels? What if I turned my dining room into my office? What if I believed in transformation?” Creativity makes dreams come true.

5. **Change inspires confidence.** If you doubt your talent or sense of style, make a list of your passions and move forward with hope. Trade your fear of failure for the joy of trying. Whether you are redesigning a room or redesigning your life, you can do it with confidence.
have? We can’t control everything life throws our way, but we can learn to beautify and manage our home.

In truth, we long to do this—and not because we are greedy. It’s quite the opposite. We nurture our love of beauty and order in our homes because we are grateful.

Has one of God’s brilliant sunrises ever taken your breath away? Has your heart nearly leapt out of your chest at the sight of a newborn baby and the miracle of new life? Creation isn’t filled with wonder by accident—I believe it was intricately designed. And we are attracted to it with all our being. God placed the desire for order and beauty within us, and we feel a connection to it the moment we witness it.

Our longing to be surrounded by beauty isn’t frivolous or unrealistic. It helps us turn our houses into homes and our someday-dreams into our realities. The lifelong opportunity to create and appreciate beauty all around us is a gift we are granted by God. We are blessed to manage our own little heaven on earth—our homes—wherever they might be.

There is divine purpose in caring for our homes and wanting them to be places of loveliness and peace. Our homes won’t ever be perfect, but we certainly can enjoy the process of creating beauty, and we can appreciate the lessons we learn along the way. There’s hope for house lovers and beauty seekers regardless of the current condition of our surroundings. We need only to grab ahold of our dreams right where we are in the everyday, beautiful mess of real life.

**Dream-House Stalkers, Unite!**

After many years of adulthood and supposed maturity, I’m still stalking beautiful houses, just as I did when I was a kid staring out the backseat window of our family car. But now I’m the one at the wheel, maneuvering around my favorite neighborhoods. I look at houses differently now than I did as a kid. My glance through a wrought-iron gate at someone else’s beautiful home doesn’t send me into fantasy mode. Instead, it nudges me to stop daydreaming about what I don’t have and to start falling in love with what I do have.
A favorite pastime of mine is to venture out at night to look at houses in the dark, when the interior lights are on, so I can get a glimpse of how cute they are inside. The rooms, I mean, not the people in the homes. I don’t even look at the people, I promise. Maybe house stalking is an addiction. (I can’t seem to stop. Do I need a treatment program?) Or maybe it is an extreme fascination. That’s it—I’m a house paparazzi!

I might be in denial, but I like to put a positive spin on these outings by thinking of them as mini business trips for my blog. (Now you know why bloggers might seem a bit insane at times. We’ve turned our addictions into careers, and we call them our passions. But that’s another book.)

I actually prefer to do a walk-by of my favorite houses so I can get closer with my zoom lens when I want to get a picture of someone’s beautiful gate or front door. I know, it sounds weird and borderline illegal to take photos of people’s front doors. Believe me, this behavior has scared my husband once or twice. One minute I’m standing outside the car, and the next minute I’ve disappeared from his rearview mirror. He probably fears I’ve climbed over a fence and fallen prey to an angry guard dog or been apprehended by the neighborhood patrol. I’m happy to report that neither of these scenarios have happened…yet.

My dream-house stalking adventures might seem risky, but I try to respect the law and neighborhood rules. And as a good citizen, I will even drive by twice just to keep the traffic flowing (and because impatient drivers in the cars behind me keep trying to rush me). Not everyone appreciates my love of houses, so I politely (or loudly under my breath from inside my car) let them know I have important business to attend to in the neighborhood. I really need a bumper sticker that says, “I brake for charming houses.” Then drivers behind me would know to expect my sudden stops and swerves, and they could drive accordingly.

One day during our first year in our current neighborhood, I went on a walk. I wasn’t expecting to see anything particularly noteworthy, so I was delighted when I came upon a house so charming it stopped me in my tracks. At first I felt a little sad that my house wasn’t as nice,
and a bit of envy started to well up inside of me. But when I got closer, I noticed something wonderful. It was like my house, at least on the outside. Only it was more finished with details, like landscaping and trellises. I now had a fresh vision for my own home.

Similarly, a couple of years ago I attended a few open houses along the water near me. While I was mid-grumble about how the grass is always greener, I looked at these model homes and realized I loved them because they had freshly painted walls and trim. All mine needed was paint! That I could do, and I didn’t even have to move or spend $100,000 more to live the dream. (Okay, so my house isn’t along the waterfront, but we do have a slight view of the water from our upstairs bathroom. You take what you can get, right?)
Falling in love with the home I have often starts with studying a room or home or style I love. Once I realize what I love about it, I’m able to figure out how to get that same feeling in my home and on my budget. There is always a personal takeaway when scouting for inspiration. And that’s just what I tell the neighborhood patrol when I’m on drive-bys. It’s part of my education. I’m a harmless, house-stalking, beautiful-room-loving dreamer.

It’s what I do. It’s who I am.

If friends happen to have a lovely house and invite me over, things can get awkward. I am easily distracted by shiny things—like their newly remodeled kitchen. As they tell me about their summer vacation, my eyes might dart to the right as I strain to look at their choice of cabinet hardware. Nothing says, “I’m listening,” quite like someone’s eyes drifting in another direction, right?

But honestly, instead of being jealous or depressed when I’m drooling over my neighbor’s new sink and faucet, I actually find artistic inspiration in beautiful homes. Studying why I love beautiful things challenges me to see them as works of art and not as impossible dreams. I enjoy beauty simply because it’s beautiful and because it inspires me to recreate it in my own way, in my own four walls, and within my ability and means.

We may not be able to afford other people’s expensive houses, but that doesn’t mean we can’t learn a thing or two from them that we can apply to our own, perhaps more humble, homes. And if you have a sprawling home, it might be the cozy cottage downtown that gets you a wee bit jealous. You can still gather ideas about adding charm and making good use of space in your bigger house. Have you ever thought about changing how you view a beautiful house? Perhaps instead of being envious, you could find a way to be inspired!

Develop a Crush on Your Home

It might seem very backward to begin falling in love with your home by first coveting the cove ceilings of a friend’s entryway. Perhaps it seems like a recipe for discontentment and unhappiness. But trust
me, as you gather ideas and learn to appreciate beauty, you will discover the qualities, characteristics, and styles that are most appealing to you. It’s about identifying the tangible and intangible special features that light up your eyes. It’s about sparking a bit of a crush on your home by ultimately turning your attention and wish list back to it and saying, “I know just the TLC you need.”

So let’s begin here. Go ahead and dream with me for a little bit. What does your dream house look like? It’s okay to dig down deep to remember what you once believed a beautiful home would look like.

Do you know what kind of home you love, or are you still trying to figure that out? You might discover your dream house on a blog or Pinterest or in a magazine. Maybe you’ve seen a home you love in person, and you decide to risk life and limb for a closer view, just as I do. Take your camera with you on walks so you can capture inspiration in the moment. Create lists of what you see that you like or don’t like. Save your dream-house pictures on Pinterest, or go old-school and rip them out of magazines to create an inspiration board or notebook.

As you dream, you’ll start to get an idea of what you love and want for your own home. Don’t worry if it’s beyond your means or it looks nothing like the house you have now. What’s most important is that you can see it in your mind even if you can’t see it when you open your eyes. We can deal with reality later…and it will be fun.

**Style Notes**

Putting your ideal decorating style into words helps clarify your vision for what you want your home to look and feel like. Learning to *describe* what you love now will help you make decisions later. So…what’s your favorite style? Feel free to make up words!
Keep On Dreaming

Keep dreaming until you can picture the whole house—front to back and every room in between. Even if you have your doubts that you'll ever live in such a home, stick with it. Let yourself enjoy dreaming. DREAM BIG! I'll wait until you're done…

Now that you've established the dream, open your eyes. How far off the mark is your life at home right now? If it's way off, don't panic or run for cover in your bed and console yourself with a bowlful of ice cream and hot fudge just yet.

I believe you can live your dream wherever you are. Yes, in that house. The one you saw when you opened your eyes. The one with the piles of clutter or undecorated rooms or mismatched hand-me-down furniture or empty walls. The too-small house with maroon carpet. The house that needs more windows or closets or bedrooms. The one that keeps you too busy with endless repairs and cleaning. The one you don’t want to call your forever home.

And no, I'm not crazy. At least I don't think so. I like to think of myself as creatively optimistic. Where there’s a will, there’s a way—no matter what the obstacle. I believe you can cultivate a love for your home regardless of your current circumstances or limitations. You just have to take the first step.

Loving the home you have isn’t about settling for what makes you unhappy or pining away, coveting something you don’t have. In fact, neither of those choices will lead to contentment at all.

Our obstacles and limitations are actually opportunities to create something more beautiful. As we redesign our homes, we start to feel more alive and in touch with the people we were created to be. We can put our own stamp of beauty right where we are when we look beyond our homes as they are to what they could be.

Beauty and Bliss

The desire to transform our everyday experience empowers us to live a full and meaningful and contented life. And the God who created you and the beauty outside your front door will delight in being reflected throughout your home.
Is the grass really greener on the other side of the fence? No. The grass is greener where you water it. When dreamers and house lovers learn to find contentment right where they are, wonderful things start to happen. Our homes become places that inspire and change the world around us.

I happen to love a good challenge. The house you have may look nothing like your dream house. Or maybe it’s close to the dream already but you’ve lost that lovin’ feeling—your zeal for homemaking. Either way, we’re going to have fun creating a home you’ll love right where you are. I’m excited to be able to help you on this journey, so thanks for letting me come along!

Are you ready to fall in love with the home you have?

**Let’s Dream**

What kind of personality does your dream house have? *Reserved and classy? Happy or serious? Or a mixture of them all?*

What is the style of your dream house, and where is it located? *Tell me more about it—is it a farmhouse? A home on the lake? A mountain lodge? A cottage in a small town? A stylish loft in the city? A spacious, traditional home in the suburbs?*

Describe how well-maintained, clean, or organized it is. *We all have different levels of order and quality that make us happy at home, so consider how important these elements are to you.*
What is your favorite room in your dream house? Why?

What colors draw you in and inspire you?

Do you dream of hosting big formal parties or casual get-togethers in your house?

How would your dream house be a blessing to your family and friends? Do you dream of entertaining overnight guests or drinking coffee in a cozy room with your best friend?

What gifts and talents would you like to use in your home? Do you want to have room for a hobby? Do you dream of running a home business?

What about a garden? Do you picture a flower garden or a vegetable garden or a simple landscape?