

If These walls Could Talk

GIVE
YOUR HOME
PERSONALITY
ONE DECORATING
DECISION AT
A TIME

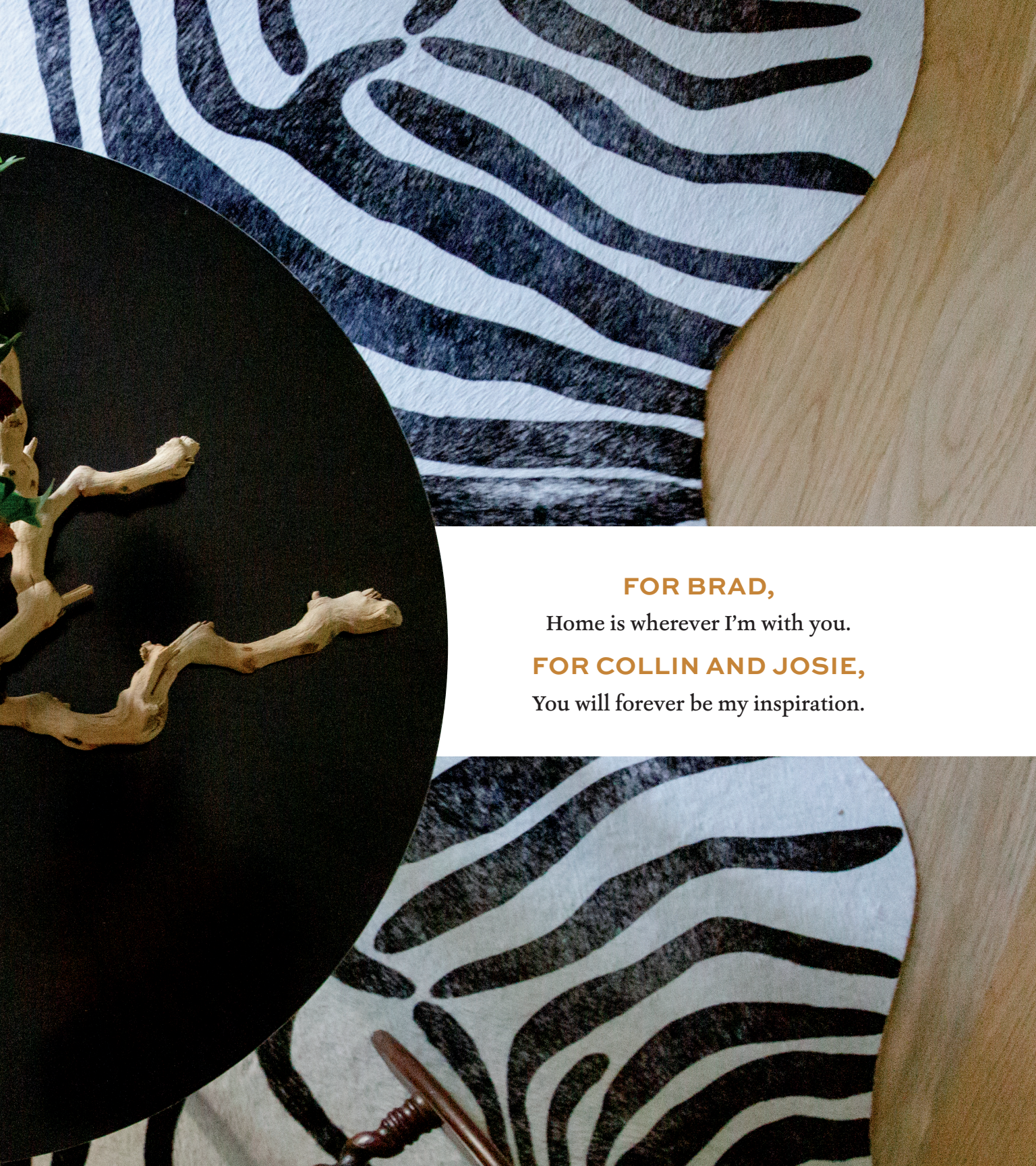
CARMEL
PHILLIPS

OUR FIFTH HOUSE BLOG

If These
Walls
Could
Talk

*CARMEL
PHILLIPS*





FOR BRAD,

Home is wherever I'm with you.

FOR COLLIN AND JOSIE,

You will forever be my inspiration.

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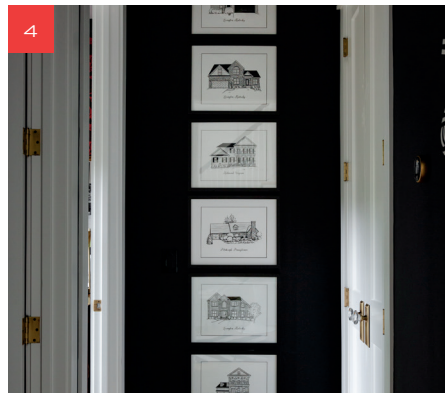
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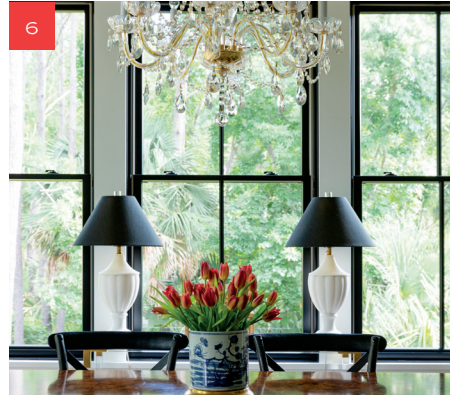
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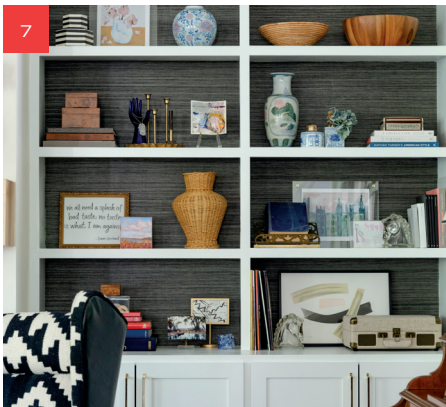
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BLACK

LITTLE WOMEN

OR
MEG, JO, BETH, AND AMY

LOUISA M. ALCOTT

Introduction

Decorating has not always been a passion of mine, but I have always loved to read. While I could not have cared less about the floral wallpaper on my childhood bedroom walls (Was it cream with pink flowers or pink with cream flowers?), I spent hours absorbing every detail of *Green Gables* alongside Anne Shirley. (How sad were those whitewashed bare walls? At least she could see the cherry tree in full bloom from her window.) It honestly was not until I had a home of my own that I started to pay attention to the actual rooms in which I was reading. Without a doubt, my love for a beautiful setting has shaped my design ethos. For me, home is more than just the place where we live; it's the setting of our life story.

It was my story-centric design philosophy that led me to start my DIY design blog, *Our Fifth House*, back in 2010, shortly after we moved into our *fifth* house—genius, right? This little corner of the internet is where I continue to share my decorating adventures, even though we are now living in our *seventh* house. Clearly, I've moved a

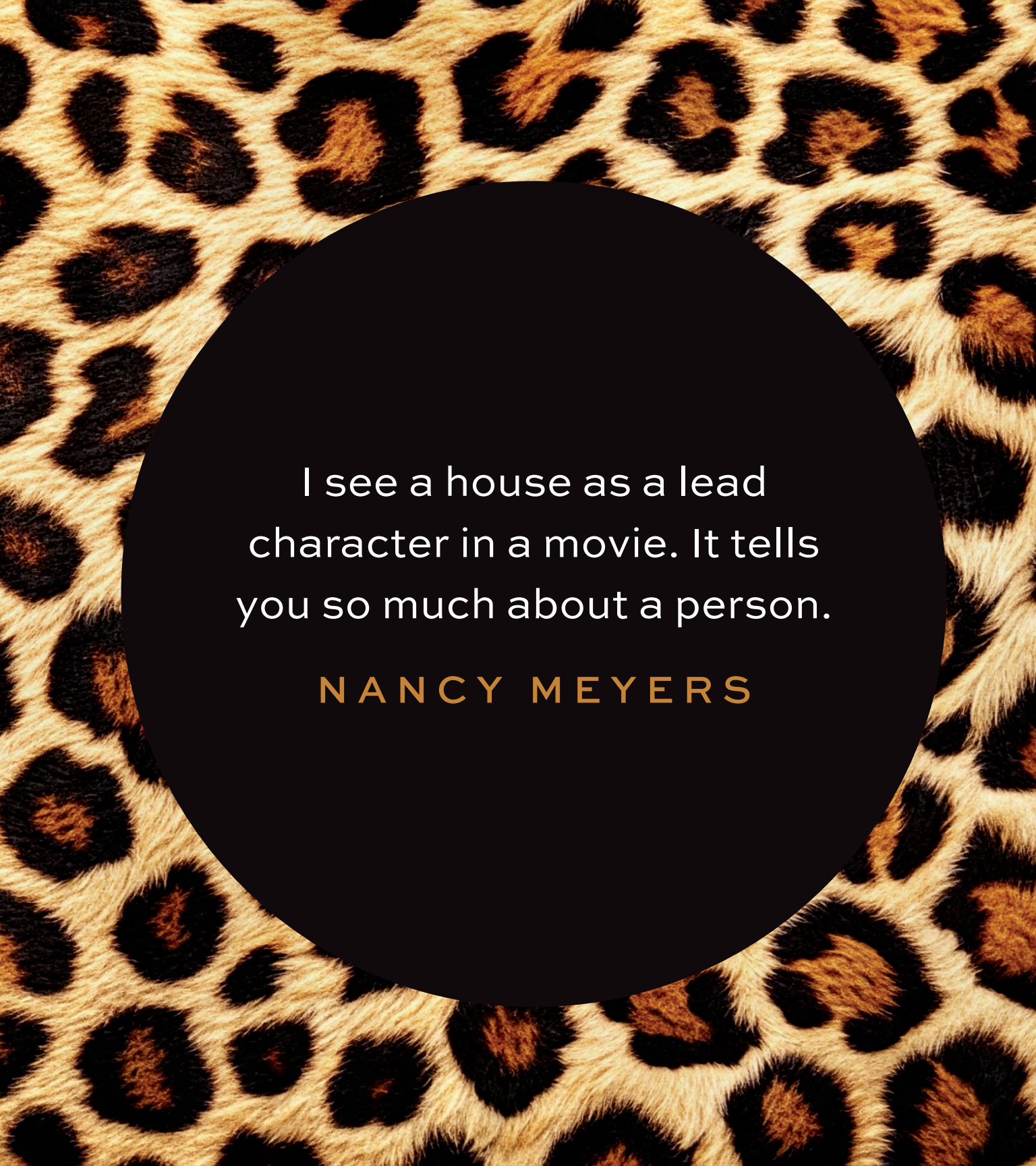
lot (and should have put a little more thought into naming my blog, but I digress).

In each house my family has called home, I have learned something new about decorating. While I'm certainly not an expert or a hardcore do-it-yourselfer, practice, lots of trial and error, and a fearless attitude have allowed me to hone my personal design vibe and truly lean into my heart-forward way of decorating. From the very beginning of my interest in design, I have believed that flipping the narrative on what our homes mean to us has an important impact on the way we go about decorating them. We often hear, *Home is where the heart is*. Yes. True. But saying, *Home is the setting of our life story*—that's a game changer! When we view home in such a significant way, suddenly decorating becomes so much more . . . *meaningful, personal, and important*. Because we're thinking not just of how we want home to look but of how we want home to *feel*. Decorating *matters*. Our homes are the backdrop of our lives. They will color our memories forever. How do we want them to be remembered?

Creating unique spaces filled with personality is my passion, and I love encouraging others to do the same in their homes. What you will not find in these pages is a list of decorating dos and don'ts. Rather, this book is your permission slip to let your creativity run free, and it is a road map to curating a home that speaks to your unique design vibe. I hope my practical decorating advice bolsters your confidence, gives you a fresh perspective, and leaves you feeling inspired to create spaces in which you love to live. After all, an empty room is a story just waiting to happen, and *you* get to be the author. If the walls in your home could talk, what would you want them to say?

Home is
the setting
of our
life story.



The background of the image is a close-up, high-resolution photograph of leopard or cheetah fur. The pattern consists of numerous dark brown and black rosettes and spots of varying sizes, set against a lighter tan or cream-colored base. The fur has a visible texture. Overlaid on this background is a large, solid black circle. Inside this circle, there is white text and a name in gold text.

I see a house as a lead
character in a movie. It tells
you so much about a person.

NANCY MEYERS



CHAPTER ONE

Discovering Your Unique Style

As a twentysomething, newly married, first-time homeowner just beginning to decorate her first house, I struggled to define my design style. I took every “find your decor style” quiz I came across and somehow ended up with a different result every time. So many hours were spent watching decorating television shows, and yet the only decorating idea that really hit home was a cautionary tale—never staple silk flowers to the wall. If you know, you know. In all seriousness, though, every designer on *Trading Spaces* gave me the confidence to play with decorating ideas in my home, and for that I will be eternally grateful. I mean, the floral-explosion bathroom designed by Hildi Santo-Tomas may still live in my mind rent-free, but I will always believe fearlessness in design should not be underestimated. It should be applauded!

While describing my design style using typical categories was challenging, I did not let that stop me from experimenting with different looks. And well, let's just say, my first homes reflected my design identity crisis. To say that I'm grateful there is no online photographic evidence of the first two places my husband and I called home is the understatement of my life. But my family and closest friends regularly love to teasingly remind me of my quite humble design beginnings.

Honestly, though, I'm grateful for those years that included lots of crackle paint, a frog prince cookie jar, a neon yellow laundry room, and a vintage radio flyer wagon I used as a living-room side table. Bless. My. Heart. My design identity crisis era was wild, friends! Mistakes were made. Lessons were learned.

What is the best lesson I learned during that time? Finding your design *vibe* trumps finding your design *style*. When I threw out the idea of *labeling the look* and leaned into *describing the feel* I was after, that was the light bulb moment for me. That is when it all started to come together, and I finally found my design rhythm.

Finding Your Vibe

Even if you can confidently define your design style, I think focusing on your design vibe is helpful. It allows you to drive home your decorating style in a more purposeful way. Design styles can be a great jumping-off point. However, it can be tricky to try to fit into one box or mesh a lot of different styles to create spaces that are truly a reflection of who you are. What I have found is that focusing on the vibe, the mood, or the feeling I want my home to convey—rather

My design
identity crisis era
was wild, friends!
Mistakes were
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were learned.



than the way I want my spaces to look—allows me to hone a style that is uniquely my own.

Trends in the world of interior design are ever evolving. Shabby Chic was all the rage when I was a twentysomething. Just a few years ago, the modern farmhouse style was exploding on Instagram, and as I draft this book, Grandmillennial style is making a huge splash. While there is nothing wrong with playing with trends or owning your design style, finding your design *vibe* gives you the insight to make your style timeless, personal, and one of a kind. It is less *copy and paste*, and more *be inspired and create, cultivate, and curate*.

Do you identify or feel at home with one or a few of these typical design styles?

Traditional	Modern	Bohemian	Maximalist
Minimalist	Coastal	Shabby Chic	French Country
English Cottage	Farmhouse	Rustic	Neo-Industrial
Eclectic	Midcentury Modern	Cottagecore	Transitional
Contemporary	Modern Farmhouse	New Traditional	Regency

Blissful
Bold
Bright
Calm
Casual
Cheerful
Comfortable
Cozy
Dignified
Dramatic
Energetic
Flirty
Fun
Gleeful
Happy
Joyful
Lively
Moody
Nostalgic
Peaceful
Playful
Quirky
Relaxing
Romantic
Serene
Tranquil
Vibrant
Vivacious
Warm
Whimsical
Zany

There is no wrong answer here, in case you are feeling nervous. If you feel confident declaring your design style, that can be wonderfully helpful when you are decorating your home. I would say, if I'm forced to choose a few of the typical design style words to simplify things, I would probably call my style Eclectic Transitional. I like mixing traditional elements with modern, but I also like sprinkling in coastal and midcentury modern touches. Is your head spinning? Welcome to my design brain. It can be a little nutty in there. While I'm slightly better at describing my style now, I didn't really have the language to describe the look I was after until I found my design *vibe*.

A Quick *Homework* Assignment

So, how do you do that? How exactly do you find your design vibe? It's simple. There are no quizzes involved. Just one simple question: How do you want your home to *feel*? The answer to that question is your vibe. Don't think too hard. Quickly, grab a pencil and a notebook. What words immediately come to mind? How do you want your home to feel when you get back after a long day? How do you want visitors to feel when they are in your home?

○ Does one or more of these words at left describe how you want your home to feel?

It is more than okay if the words you would use to describe the vibe you want for your home are not on this list. This collection of words is just meant to get you thinking in terms of feelings instead of styles. I recommend choosing three main words to describe the overall vibe you want for your home. And as you reflect on each individual room in your home, you might land on one or two



alternates. Your alternate words will replace one of your three words to better describe the vibe you want for that particular room.

Fashion influencer and wardrobe consultant Allison Bornstein (<https://www.allisonbornstein.com>) recommends choosing three words to describe your fashion style. With fashion and home design

both providing the perfect opportunity to express your individual style, it comes as no surprise that this exercise works well in both arenas.

As an example, my design vibe words for my home are: *warm*, *bold*, and *comfortable*. And my alternate words are: *moody* and *whimsical*. Warm and bold are my staples. This is the vibe I want every room in my house to convey, but comfortable is interchangeable

in some spaces. I have replaced comfortable with moody or whimsical in a few rooms. My powder room, for instance, is not a space where comfort was top of mind. Whimsical better describes the specific vibe I wanted to create in that space. So, the overall look feels warm, bold, and whimsical. The vintage brass and wood plant stands bring warmth, while the color of the walls paired with the black-and-white tile design feels bold. And the art, chandelier, and metallic wallpaper on the ceiling bring in a whimsical vibe.

Could I describe this space as Modern Traditional? Maybe. But leaning into my design vibe—warm, bold, and whimsical—is what helped me bring this space to life. Is this a space everyone is going to like? No. But everyone does not live in my home, so everyone's opinion does not matter. I'm not trying to convince you to like my design vibe. My goal is to encourage you to find yours.

QUICK TIP

When going through this quick design exercise, it can also be helpful to identify how you *don't* want your home to feel. Maybe you don't want your home to feel stuffy, formal, or fussy. Identifying how you don't want your home to feel can be as helpful as identifying how you do want it to feel.

Why three words? Because threes work well in design (more on that in chapter 7). But honestly, you do not have to choose three words. I have found, though, that the mix of three words seems to magically create a design vibe that is utterly personal and unique.

Take a Cue from Your Wardrobe

If you are struggling to answer the question of how you want your home to feel, take a field trip. You will not have to go far; you do not even need to leave your home. The answer to that question is likely lurking in your dresser drawers and your closet. Let your wardrobe be your guide. What you feel at home wearing is often a great indicator of what you will feel at home surrounding yourself with when it comes to decorating.

Do you live in jeans and t-shirts? Casual and comfortable might be your staple design vibe words. Is your closet filled with floral prints and dresses? Romantic comes to mind. Do you get the most excited about sweater season? Warm and cozy sounds like you. The answers are there. Maybe you didn't realize it but, more often than not, what excites you in the fashion world translates to interior design.

Warm, autumnal colors make up the majority of my wardrobe, and I've rarely met a leopard print I did not love. Hello, **bold**. While I spend most of my days in tennis shoes, a glittery heel makes me feel things. So, welcome to the show, **comfortable** and **whimsical**. Finally, my favorite band is The Cure, and if I am not wearing red, camel, or burnt orange, I'm in black. And **moody** just entered the chat. Moral of the story? Take a cue from your wardrobe.

QUICK TIP

If you are still unsure after looking through your wardrobe, ask a trusted friend how they would describe your fashion vibe. Sometimes we do not see ourselves as accurately as others do because we can be overly self-critical.



Striped Door

Painting the back of a door makes for a fun surprise in a powder room! Stripes are classic and timeless, but when done in bold colors, they can feel whimsical. Paired with a glass doorknob, they bring in an Alice in Wonderland flair.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Two different paint colors (I used the colors Plum Dandy and Chinese Red in a semi-gloss Sherwin-Williams Emerald Urethane Trim Enamel)
- Smooth surface paint roller
- Level
- Delicate surface painter's tape (emphasis on *delicate surface*)
- Fine-grit sandpaper

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

Step 1: Lightly sand to prep the door for the base paint color.

Step 2: Using a smooth surface paint roller, apply your chosen base color.

Step 3: Allow the base to cure (fully dry) before taping. Then use a level to carefully place your first stripe of tape. The first one is the most important. Once that one is in place, you will build off it, placing a small piece of tape next to your taped stripe to use as a guide as you work from top to bottom taping off the next stripe. Continue this process until the entire door is completely striped with tape.

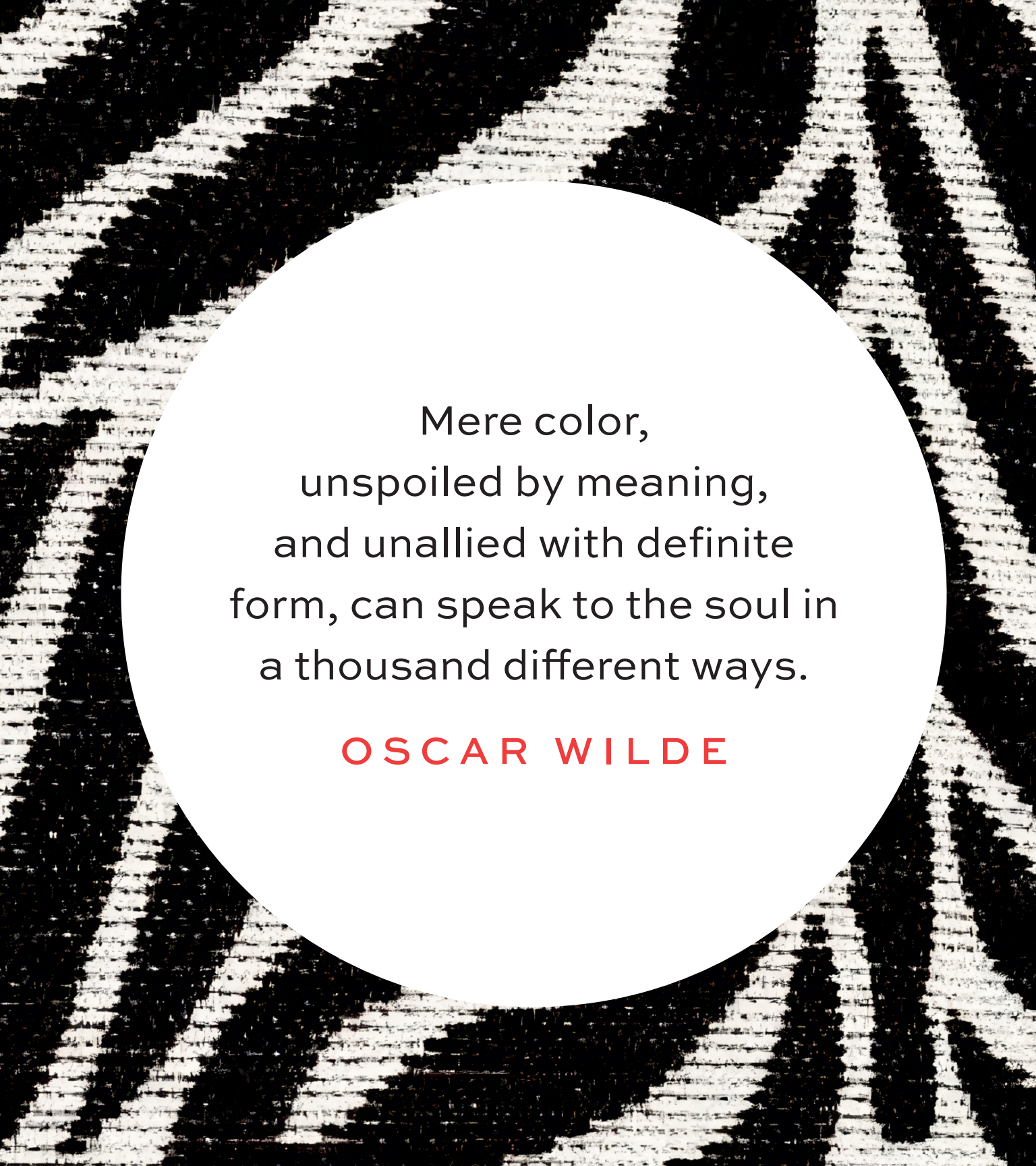
Step 4: Gently press down the edges of your tape before painting your second color to prevent the paint from bleeding through.

Step 5: Carefully remove tape before the paint has completely dried to avoid peeling the paint.

QUICK TIP

A small craft paintbrush works well for any needed touch-ups.





Mere color,
unspoiled by meaning,
and unallied with definite
form, can speak to the soul in
a thousand different ways.

OSCAR WILDE

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Chart on page 31 informed by <https://platt.edu/blog/psychology-color-graphic-design/>



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