

Compliments of Stacey Shanner

*Good to Be*

issue 24

**HOME**



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*Happy*  
**HOLIDAYS**




## Front of Tear Out Card 1



**So You're Going Away for the Holidays...**  
HERE'S HOW TO PREP

Holiday plans may require traveling, but this could make you uneasy about leaving your home unattended. Use these tips to prepare your house the right way for added peace of mind.




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## Back of Tear Out Card 1



**CLEAN OUT YOUR REFRIGERATOR**  
This is one of those tasks that is easily forgotten, but it can leave your home smelling seriously unpleasant when you return from your time away. Check the expiration dates on items that go bad quickly—such as milk and eggs—and use this as an excuse to throw away any other perishable items that could have you regretting leaving in the first place.

**LET YOUR NEIGHBORS KNOW OF YOUR PLANS**  
We usually remember to let our friends and family know we're leaving for the holidays, but make sure you don't forget about your neighbors. Have them check your mail, and leave your cell phone number or any other emergency numbers with them in case anything happens while you're gone.

**DOUBLE-CHECK THE LOCKS**  
Everyone knows to lock the front door, but windows and other entrances are often easily forgotten. Before leaving on your trip, take the time to go through your home, double-checking that every possible entrance is secure before you leave.

**TURN ON SECURITY TECH**  
Remember to set your alarm system, and utilize other smart security features in your home, such as lights you can time and control from your phone. Configure your settings ahead of time.

**UNPLUG APPLIANCES**  
Another often overlooked chore is unplugging any appliances that you normally keep plugged in throughout the day. Phone chargers, hairstyling tools, the toaster, the microwave, and other small appliances should be unplugged to avoid any safety mishaps.

**DO THE LAUNDRY**  
You washed your vacation clothes, but did you remember to take care of used towels or other dirty laundry lying around? Just like coming home to a smelly refrigerator isn't ideal, neither is walking into a room and immediately noticing the full hamper. Take a couple of hours to make sure everything is washed.



Dear Bill and Judy,

As one year comes to a close and another begins, you might be inclined to turn your mind toward the future. This issue of Good to Be Home can help you do so by exploring a myriad of ways to embrace the new and exciting in your home life in 2025, including a guide to moving during this busy time of year, popular design aesthetics worth adopting, and tips for improving your home's security.

Moving comes with many considerations, but it can be particularly challenging during and after the holiday season. If you're planning to relocate soon, be sure to read the enclosed article that explains how you can make the process easier for yourself and your family.

Perhaps instead of a move, you're simply looking to improve your home's design. Florida-based designer Laetitia Laurent offers a variety of creative ideas to help you transform your spaces without spending a fortune or investing months of your time.

If you're like most homeowners, your family's safety is your top priority. However, you may be unsure of the best enhancements to make. In this issue, you'll find a list of nine essential areas to focus on to improve the security of your living spaces and give you greater peace of mind.

What changes are you most looking forward to in the new year? As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

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# crafty ways to UPCYCLE Greeting Cards

written by: LAUREN KIM



Exchanging holiday cards with friends and family is a cherished tradition for many. But what can be done with the cards after the season ends—especially ones with glittery surfaces that can prevent them from decomposing or being recycled? You can repurpose them with these artful projects.

## Garland

One option is to turn them into a beautiful garland for decorating a wall or fireplace mantel. First, use a cup or cookie cutter to trace shapes on each card, and punch a hole at the top. To assemble your garland, thread a string through each shape, tying knots before and after the holes if desired to help the cutouts stay in place. Once you're satisfied with how your garland looks, you can store it away with your other holiday decorations to enjoy next year.

## Gift tags

Repurpose a card into several gift tags by cutting it into circles, rectangles, or squares with a pair of scissors. Use a punch to create a hole in one end of each before slipping a ribbon through for taping or tying them onto future gifts.

## Magnets

You can easily convert your cards into new decorative items with the help of old advertising or calendar magnets. Cut a magnet and a card into matching shapes, then glue the paper onto the magnet. Use your new masterpieces to anchor photos, grocery lists, or reminder notes onto your refrigerator.

***With just a little creativity, you can create a whole new collection of decorative items for your home and gifts next holiday season.***

# help your Household Heating

written by: ANDRE RIOS



As winter's yearly chill descends, you'll likely turn to a trusty appliance to keep you comfortable and healthy: your heater. Though various systems may each have different fuel sources and air-distribution technology, conducting proper upkeep is essential to ensuring optimal performance, preventing safety concerns, and prolonging its life span. Take a look at some general heating-maintenance tips and potential upgrades that can help you stay cozy this season.

## Know your heater

Thanks to technological advances, there are more heating systems to choose from than ever. Among the most common are forced-air units, which generate warmth from an electric, propane, oil, or natural-gas furnace, then distribute heated air through ducts or vents. Radiant heaters, alternatively, are powered by electricity or steam and use panels in floors, walls, or ceilings to radiate heat throughout a home. Meanwhile, hot-water baseboard heaters are easily recognizable for their low-placed vents, and boiler systems use heated water to direct warmth through radiators.

That said, it may be difficult to identify the exact type of heating unit and air-distribution system in your home, particularly if you own a mix of several units like wall-mounted ductless mini splits that each warm individual rooms. The best way to identify the technology you own, understand its fuel sources, and maintain it is to hire a heating-maintenance technician.

## Perform basic maintenance

While you should turn over the direct mechanical work to a professional, some maintenance tasks will still fall to you. Of chief importance, replace air filters at least every ninety days to help reduce airborne pollutants and clear buildup that can clog your heating appliances. In addition, clean your indoor vent grates, the exterior of your radiator, and air registers (grates in your floor) weekly to clear obstructions like dust.

Just as important, you should address any warm-air-loss issues immediately. For example, drafty windows or doors, subpar insulation, and damaged ductwork can diffuse warmed air, which not only wastes money but also increases the workload on your heating system. You can attempt some DIY solutions, such as caulking the edges of windows and adding weather strips to exterior doors. But if you notice that certain areas still feel colder throughout the day or seem less responsive to heating cycles, notify an HVAC technician.

### Making an upgrade

Unfortunately, even regular maintenance and occasional repairs won't keep your unit running forever. Like all technology, heating systems eventually decline in performance—so in some cases, outright replacement may be a wise investment. Some common signs it's time for an upgrade include:

- A system greater than fifteen years old
- Frequent repair needs
- Spiking energy costs
- Visible damage, such as rust or cracks

If you notice any of the above, you should probably start planning to replace the unit. Determining the best heating system for your home requires considering numerous factors, including your budget, climate conditions in your region, the ductwork within your home, and your ideal replacement time frame. So if you're seriously considering making an upgrade, reach out to an HVAC technician, who can help you weigh your options and arrive at the optimal decision.



Requesting to upgrade your thermostat to a programmable model can be another impactful improvement. Newer ones may produce more accurate temperature readings and allow you to adjust your heating needs based on your daily routine and cold-weather fluctuations. This both ensures efficient operation and prevents you from overusing your heater, potentially extending its life span.

### High-efficiency options

Use the Energy Star directory as your go-to source when shopping for upgrades. It includes modern, high-efficiency appliances that have satisfied rigorous efficiency criteria and may even offer superior performance and more innovative features than standard products. A variety of heating equipment, such as furnaces, boilers, heat pumps, and even thermostats, is listed there. As you weigh the benefits of improving your technology, prioritize these options to enjoy superior household heating and ongoing cost savings.

*Ultimately, an effective heating system not only keeps you warm but also works efficiently, saves you money, and operates without issues that can shorten its life span. Before the coldest temperatures arrive and you feel the need to crank up your heater, get in touch with a maintenance professional, who will provide in-depth inspections to diagnose and address any issues impacting your system and offer personalized advice for making the most of it.*



# SEASONAL *moving tips*

written by: CHRISTY MURDOCK

You can't always choose when you're making a move, and sometimes, unfortunately, it falls during a time of year that brings greater logistical and emotional challenges. If you must move during the holiday season or shortly after, here's how to simplify the process while also taking care of yourself and your family.

## MAKE A PLAN

Thorough planning is always important when moving, but it will be critical if you're doing so during this busy season. If you haven't already, create a detailed timeline and checklist to help you stay on task and minimize stress. In addition, make sure that you're communicating well with the members of your household as well as with other family and friends to ensure that everyone's on the same page.

## SEEK SUPPORT

This is not the time to go it alone; you'll feel better if you lean on loved ones and professional movers during the process. When someone asks how they can help, tell them! Delegating tasks and accepting assistance will, quite literally, help you to lighten the load.

## MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Understand that moving during this time of year is bound to come with more challenges and disruptions. Set realistic expectations, be flexible with your plans, and go into the process knowing that this holiday season may not look like a Norman Rockwell painting. Everything will eventually get done if you keep your eye on the end goal.



### **MAINTAIN SELF-CARE**

This is the time to prioritize taking good care of yourself. Don't forego your usual exercise, meditation, and relaxation. They're not indulgences—they're necessary for managing your mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

### **CELEBRATE SMALL VICTORIES**

Don't forget that the holidays are a time of enjoyment. Make your moving process more fun by celebrating small milestones and achievements along the way, whether you simply packed up a room or completed a successful move-in day. Acknowledging your progress will give you and your family a morale boost to help keep you feeling positive and motivated.

### **STAY ORGANIZED**

With how much you have going on, you'll save yourself time if you stay

organized. Label boxes clearly and carefully, and set aside a bin for essential, first-night items so you're not searching for them later. Also, keep a moving binder or detailed notes in your phone with contact information and copies of important documents.

### **CREATE A SENSE OF NORMALCY**

If you're moving before the end of the year, maintaining holiday traditions and routines amid the chaos will be good for everyone. Depending on your timing, put out a few decorations in your old place to keep the spirit alive while you pack or adorn your new space with them, even if it's not perfectly put together. This can also help preserve some of the holiday magic for children and ease anxieties about the move. Above all, prioritize quality time with those you love to help keep perspective on what matters most.



## PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Take some time out of each day to reflect on new experiences and happy outcomes. While your move might not be entirely perfect, focus on its positive aspects, such as a shorter commute, new opportunities, closer proximity to family, more space, or a big backyard.

## BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Remember to cut yourself some slack during this challenging time. Moving is inherently demanding, and doing so during the holidays or immediately after is even more so. Give yourself the gift of grace and compassion, and recognize that it's OK not to be perfect—even if there's a few bumps in the road, everything will work out fine in the long run.

*The true gift of the holiday season isn't found in the presents under the tree but in the joy of shared space and the support and strength you'll find within yourself and your loved ones. As you reflect on cherished memories and celebrate new beginnings, embrace whatever challenges your moving day may hold, keeping an open mind, a positive perspective, and a focus on every aspect of what it means to be home.*



# DELIGHTFUL DESIGNS *for 2025*

**written by:** ANDRE RIOS  
**photography:** AS NOTED

As the calendar flips to a new year, take this opportunity to switch up your home design as well. If you're looking to refresh and add spark to your treasured abode, try some of these novel concepts courtesy of celebrated Boca Raton-based interior designer Laetitia Laurent.

## *Blur the boundaries*

The craze for open-concept living may be on its way out, but homeowners are finding inspiration in an even breezier space: the outdoors. "There's a big trend toward bringing the outdoors in and taking the indoors out," says Laurent. She recommends updating your outdoor hosting spaces with softer performance fabrics such as weather-resistant polyester cushions; these options convey indoor style while also being resilient enough for backyard entertaining.

Although you could undergo renovations to open up your doors and windows, removing the visual obstructions between an interior room and the backyard, Laurent instead recommends a simpler trick: motif flooring. Laying the same flooring material or rug in both spaces "continues the eye from the inside toward the backyard," she says. Then color-match your accent decor to further indicate that these spaces are not distinct but flow together.



photo credit: JACK COOK

### *Do something surprising*

Even a single unique or thought-provoking feature can revive a dull room and instill it with personality. For example, in her own Paris apartment, Laurent centered the living room with a kidney-bean-shaped coffee table from the NV Gallery x jaimetoutcheztoi capsule collection and lined the room's built-in shelving with an eye-catching blue lacquer lining. And while tulip dining tables will be particularly popular in 2025, her choice to place a glossy, white model amid neutral brown surroundings creates a fascinating visual contrast, inviting you to settle in for a meal.

Such products could inspire some more adventurous shopping decisions at your local vintage store or furniture outlet. In an age of mass-produced goods, artful features like these can make just about any room feel uniquely curated and refreshed.

### *Rethink (and revive) antiques*

If you find contemporary elements cold or unwelcoming, Laurent invites you to embrace classic designs from the past. "Good design stands the test of time," she states. "Trends come and go, so I always ask myself, 'Will this be relevant twenty years from now?'"

However, there's a difference between traditional and dated design. To make classic elements feel fresh, clean and restore your long-toothed antiques, then take a current approach with them. For example, orient your seating symmetrically around a central coffee table, use accent decor sparingly, and tighten your color scheme so it's neutral-forward with one to two compatible accent colors.

### *Revisit minimalism*

The minimalist lifestyle was often scoffed at for its cold, almost corporate appearance, and the subsequent trend of maximalism was an intentional about-face toward more



detail and intentional clutter. However, Laurent is eyeing an updated version of minimalism with a personality transplant, which she describes as "spaces that are clean but in a warm color palette." She elaborates: "Cold colors, stark neutrals, and aluminum-metallic finishes are on their way out in favor of warm-toned, off-white fabrics, for example." To embrace this look, warm up your color scheme with neutral hues like terra-cotta and inviting materials like authentic wood. Then pare down your decor to a few treasured pieces so they don't get lost in surrounding visual clutter but instead sing on their own to make an impact.

***As you proceed into the new year, think about which style elements cater directly to your personality and lifestyle, even if that simply means editing your current decor or bringing antique items out of storage. Dramatic changes like these can craft a fresh new space to inspire you in the months ahead.***



**photo credits:** (left and right) LAURE NELL INTERIORS, GILLES TRILLARD

# a celebration OF CAKE

recipes by: TRACEY ZABAR

written by: ELLEN SILVERMAN



Nothing turns heads during get-togethers or family meals like the enticing aroma of a decadent cake pulled fresh from the oven. Take yours to a new level with these recipes from the *Sweet Little Cakes from Mrs. Zabbar's Bakeshop* cookbook. With flavors ranging from chocolate to pecan, you'll be sure to find a dessert that will have everyone's mouths watering.

Makes one 5-inch  
bundt cake (Serves 4)

## *citrus* POPPY SEED CAKE

Poppy seed cake is often made with too much lemon and a sticky, overly sweet glaze. Try my take on this old favorite. If desired, substitute lemon, lime, clementine, or tangerine zest and juice for the orange. Serve with candied orange peel on the side.

### *ingredients:*

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more for the pan
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- Finely grated zest of ¼ orange
- 1 large egg
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon freshly squeezed orange juice
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons poppy seeds
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

### *instructions:*

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter one 5-inch well of a Bundt quartet pan, and set aside.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the remaining 2 tablespoons butter and the granulated sugar. Add the orange zest and egg and beat until combined, then add the cream, orange juice, and vanilla and beat to combine. Add the poppy seeds and mix until incorporated. Add the flour, baking powder, and salt and mix just until combined.
3. Scrape into the prepared pan and bake until the edges start to brown and the cake is set, about 35 minutes. Cool for 10 minutes in the pan, then remove the cake from the hot pan and allow to cool completely on a wire rack. Dust with confectioners' sugar before serving.



SCAN QR CODE  
for the full cookbook.

Excerpted from *Sweet Little Cakes from Mrs. Zabbar's Bakeshop: Perfect Desserts for Sharing*. © 2023 Tracey Zabbar. Photography by Ellen Silverman. Used with permission of Rizzoli New York.

Makes four 4 by 2-inch cakes (Serves 4)

# LAMINGTONS

This amazing treat from Down Under will wow your guests. You will be surprised at how easy it is to whip up a little batch to make everyone happy.

## ingredients:

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus more for the pan
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon full-fat sour cream
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¾ cup cake flour
- Pinch of salt
- 2 ounces milk or dark chocolate, chopped
- 3 tablespoons heavy cream
- 1½ cups unsweetened shredded coconut
- 2 tablespoons raspberry jam
- 4 raspberries, for topping

## instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter an 8-inch square baking pan and set aside.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the remaining 4 tablespoons butter and the granulated sugar. Add the egg, egg yolk, sour cream, and vanilla and mix to incorporate. Add the flour and salt, and mix just until combined. Scrape into the prepared pan and bake until the edges start to brown and the center is set, about 13 minutes. Cool completely in the pan before removing the cake from the pan.
3. While the cake is cooling, place the chocolate and cream in the top of a double boiler. Gently whisk until the chocolate melts and the mixture is smooth. Pour into a heatproof bowl and let cool for 5 minutes.
4. Cut the cake into four 4-inch squares. Place the coconut in a medium bowl. Spread the jam on top of 2 squares. Place the 2 remaining squares on top of the jam-topped squares. With 2 forks, dip one cake into the chocolate, coating all sides, then lift the square with the forks and dip it into the coconut, coating all sides. Repeat with the remaining cake.
5. Place both squares on a platter in the refrigerator for 20 minutes before serving. Slice each square into two rectangles. Top each with a raspberry.





Makes one 4 by 13-inch  
cake (Serves 6)

## chocolate-hazelnut-topped CAKE

This simple, spongy cake is made in a tart pan and marbled with an Italian favorite, gianduia—chocolate-hazelnut spread.

### *ingredients:*

- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus more for the pan
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla bean paste
- 1 cup cake flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chocolate-hazelnut spread (gianduia), store-bought, for topping

### *instructions:*

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 4 by 13-inch rectangular tart pan with a removable bottom and set aside.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the remaining 8 tablespoons butter and the granulated sugar. Beat in the eggs, then the vanilla bean paste. When the vanilla bean paste is incorporated, add the flour and mix just until combined. Scrape into the prepared pan.
3. Bake until set, about 25 minutes. Cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then remove the sides of the pan (be careful, it will still be very hot). Cool the cake completely on the bottom of the pan set on a wire rack. Cover the cooled cake with plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator before piping the top.
4. Pipe the chocolate-hazelnut spread in lines across the width of the cake, and drag a toothpick or knife the length of the cake, alternating directions to make a chevron pattern. Remove the bottom of the pan before cutting the cake.

Makes ten 1½ by 4-inch bars or four 4-inch squares (Serves 4 to 5)

## pecan BARS

Is this a cake? Or a pie? Or some form of cookie? Is it a cousin of the brookie (part brownie, part cookie)? It doesn't matter because these yummy squares are sweet and gooey. They are a favorite of my pecan pie-loving son Michael.

### ingredients:

#### Crust

- ⅓ cup granulated sugar
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon heavy cream
- 1 cup all-purpose flour

#### Filling

- 2 large eggs
- ⅓ cup light corn syrup
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla bean paste
- 1 tablespoon heavy cream
- Pinch of salt
- 1½ cups pecan halves
- ½ cup chocolate chips

### instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line an 8-inch square pan with parchment paper, and set aside.
2. To make the crust, in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the granulated sugar and butter. Add the cream, then the flour, mix just until combined, and press into the prepared pan. (Leave the paddle attachment on the mixer, and return the unwashed bowl to the mixer.)
3. Bake the crust until it starts to brown on the edges, about 20 minutes. Let the crust cool a bit while you prepare the filling, leaving the oven on.
4. To make the filling, add the eggs to the bowl of the mixer and beat them, then add the corn syrup, brown sugar, melted butter, vanilla bean paste, cream, and salt and mix until well combined.
5. Pour the filling onto the crust, and scatter a layer of pecans over the top, then scatter the chocolate chips on top of the nuts. Bake about 30 minutes.
6. Cool completely in the pan, then refrigerate in the pan for at least 1 hour. Remove the cake from the pan, discard the parchment paper, trim the edges, and cut into 1½ by 4-inch bars or 4-inch squares.



# — 5 Things — *First-Time* *homeowners* Need to Know

written by: ALLISON GOMES

Becoming a first-time homeowner is an exciting milestone, whether you're in your twenties, thirties, forties, or beyond. But amid the thrill of the experience, there are inevitably many lessons to be learned and challenges to overcome along the way. As you take your next steps into homeownership, consider these five insights to help make the process easier.

## *It takes time to make a home*

You might expect that you'll be able to simply move in your belongings and have a house you're happy with right from the start. However, transforming your new space into a home that truly reflects your personality takes time. You'll most likely need more furniture and decor like rugs and pictures to enhance both aesthetics and functionality, and you won't necessarily know how much or which ones you'll have to acquire until after you move in. Resist the urge to go on a large shopping spree as soon as you're in your new house. Instead, take the time to unpack all your items and live in your spaces so you can get a feel for what each one needs. Maybe it won't look like your Pinterest board right away, but that's OK—by being thoughtful and deliberate with your choices, you can better ensure that you create a home you'll love for years to come.







### *DIY projects often look easier online*

Many people love a good DIY project, at least until they're halfway in and begin to question why they thought it was a good idea in the first place. While DIY renovations are a great way to save money and personalize your home, online tutorials don't always portray the realities of what it's like to redo your cabinets, flooring, or bathroom. These projects, especially large-scale ones, can be challenging, frustrating, and time-consuming—but also incredibly rewarding. The key is simply to be well informed about the process and mentally prepared for what it entails. Then, when the project is finally done, you can take a step back and say, “Yeah, I did that.”



### *Specific air filter sizes matter*

It's relatively common knowledge that air filters need to be changed regularly, at least once every two or three months. One thing that may catch you by surprise when buying new ones, though, is that these filters come in *very* specific sizes; that seemingly insignificant half an inch can make a huge difference on the efficiency of your HVAC system and the air quality in your home. Take the time to check the measurements on the filter currently installed before buying a replacement, and do yourself a favor by planning ahead: buy a multipack so you have extras on hand for the future. Just as important, be sure to write the replacement date on the filter so you don't keep thinking you changed it two months ago when it's really almost been a year.



### *Yard work isn't always a breeze*

Are you dreaming of a beautiful lawn that's weed-free and the envy of the neighborhood? Don't expect it to be a breeze; maintaining a lawn comes with a big learning curve if you've never done it before. Weeds can be stubborn, soil conditions are often temperamental, and weather is unpredictable. On top of that, yard work can simply be exhausting. (Take it from someone who spent a week manually dethatching her lawn in the heat of summer.) However, your efforts and hard work will be rewarded over time. Sure, you may not be able to get a perfectly sharp edge around your yard initially, but with more practice, you can improve your skills and create the yard of your dreams.

### *Your real estate agent is a valuable resource*

Just because you closed on your home doesn't mean your relationship with your real estate

agent has to end. Beyond helping you find the perfect property, they offer a wealth of knowledge and resources you may want to tap into in the future. Need to upgrade your flooring? They likely know a reputable contractor. Considering an addition to your home? They can recommend a reliable builder. Agents understand what it takes to maintain a home or transform it into a dream space, so don't hesitate to reach out for advice or referrals when you need assistance with repairs or renovations. They're often more than happy to help.

***Becoming a homeowner is a journey filled with numerous learning experiences, but it's a thrilling one to embark on. Embrace the process, and you'll enjoy every step of making your house a home.***

interview with: KIRSTEN BLAZEK written by: MATTHEW BRADY photography: AS NOTED

# Outside-the-Box DESIGN



**K**irsten Blazek discusses her unconventional road to success and her design philosophies, which are featured in her first book, *A 1000 X Better: A Rebel by Design*.

**Tell us about yourself:** There has always been something creative in me: I was good at art and loved rearranging my bedroom while growing up in Scotland. My parents worried that art wouldn't be a stable living, though, so I followed my gran and mom into health care. I was an ICU nurse for a long time in Scotland and then here in America before having my kids.

Years later, I was getting a divorce and needed to go back to work. I began looking for jobs in nursing again, but I just couldn't go back. Instead, I started my business in my late thirties without having a clue where it would take me. It's been a pretty crazy journey.

**What was your first design project?** Technically, my own home in Altadena. Another mom from school loved what I did and insisted that I help a friend of hers in Malibu. I told her it was ridiculous because I had never decorated someone else's house before. Her reply? "Don't worry about it. You've either got it or you don't—and you've got it." It wasn't a big job; I did it for practically no money to get my portfolio started. After that, I staged a house for a real estate friend, which led me to originally found A 1000 X Better as a staging company.

**What is the purpose behind your book?** My partner, Jake, is an amazing writer. He and I looked at a lot of coffee-table books and design books, many of which felt impersonal. It was important to both of us that we created something inspirational, helping people realize that it's never too late to take a risk, follow your gut, and do something different by telling the story of a woman who wouldn't take no for an answer.



photo credits: (left and right) MICHAEL P.H. CLIFFORD

**In it, you say that you “listen to what a house wants.” How so?** People get overwhelmed because there are so many design resources available today; they're inundated with imagery on Instagram and Pinterest that's not necessarily right for them or their house. So we always ask new clients to share examples of things they like, and quite often they're all over the place. Getting them to understand what they like for *their* home can be challenging.

That's why I listen to houses. I really believe that they are living, breathing entities, especially old ones. If you ignore the home's essence when decorating or designing, the project can get very unfocused and feel inauthentic. There must be a balance between meeting the needs of modern living and being respectful of the structure.

**One chapter is titled “Color Is Everything.” Do you consider yourself to be an artist?** I like that analogy. Starting a design is like starting a painting for me. Much like a painter with a blank canvas, I instinctually get a sense of what I can do and how the space can work. And because colors are so nuanced, they can go so right or so wrong with just one shade. When I look at a color, I see not only the hue itself but also all the other ones within it, such as a brown that has too much green or purple in it.

Part of my job is to think about the things that a homeowner wouldn't. It's vital to understand where a house is in its entirety, so I'm vigilant when picking colors. I always make sure that we have at least four or five different samples of, say, a white, put big swatches up, and tell the homeowner to look at them in the morning and afternoon and at night before deciding. This is important for exteriors as well.

**You include interesting details in your projects, such as remarkable light fixtures and paintings. How do you make such choices?** It's another example of balance. For instance, I prefer to keep bigger pieces of furniture somewhat neutral but mix the materials, which adds depth. I also enjoy doing unconventional things like hanging art in unusual places, such as under windows, while still ensuring that it pairs well with the rest of the room. The goal is to create visual excitement when you walk in.

Lighting is another of my favorite things to play with; it makes such a difference in a space. One project I did had a room with a big, tall ceiling and a nice view outside the door. I wanted to make the ceiling more interesting but didn't want to block the view with a solid fixture. So I went with an architecturally quirky hat-shaped wire light fixture that wouldn't prevent the eye from seeing the beautiful outside.



photo credit: VIRTUALLY HERE STUDIOS



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photo credit: MICHAEL P.H. CLIFFORD



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I also like vintage decor and art, especially oil paintings. There's a depth and story to them compared to a piece of generic store-bought art. They add a sense of authenticity and are inherently unique—nobody else is ever going to have *that* painting in their house.

**Your book states that you went into nursing because you enjoy talking to and helping people. Is this mindset invaluable as a designer?**

Absolutely. Nursing taught me to have empathy, be kind, and listen. Likewise, as a designer, I genuinely listen to my clients; I can't just give them what *I* want because it's not my house.

Ultimately, I want them to feel like the design is faithful to them, so at the outset my team and I discuss in-depth what they want from the project both aesthetically and functionally.

In addition, I learned a lot about relationships through nursing, which is very helpful to me now because you quite often have to negotiate difficult situations between couples who have different tastes.

**Would you elaborate on your belief that good design helps a person heal?** Everybody deserves to come home to a space they feel good in. Life can be hard, and

your house protects, nurtures, and comforts you. So if even just one object in your place makes you smile every time you see it, you have a safe place that offers healing.

**You wrote that “constantly looking at yourself and finding new things about who you are is one of the great joys in life.” How do you do this?**

Traveling is one of the most important ways to expand my mind. Today, for example, I went to the Art Institute of Chicago and took in incredible art. It’s easy to walk through life just looking straight ahead, but when you really keep your eyes open and pay attention to the fine details, even the simplest, most inconspicuous thing can be inspirational. I always do my best to take nothing for granted.

I’m also constantly changing personally, as we all are—change is the only thing we can’t avoid. I’m a much more experienced designer now than when I started, and my tastes have altered even over the last few years. Right now, I’m in a massive seventies kick, but in two years it could be something completely different. That’s what makes life exciting.

*For more info, visit [a1000xbetter.com](http://a1000xbetter.com)*



**SCAN QR CODE**  
for the full  
*A 1000 X Better* book.



photo credit: MICHAEL P.H. CLIFFORD

photo credit: VIRTUALLY HERE STUDIOS

# Bright Ideas

for Your Old written by: LAUREN KIM

## HOLIDAY LIGHTS



For many, twinkling holiday lights are a beautiful and anticipated seasonal feature. But what should you do with them after they stop working or when you want new ones? With these ideas, you can find a new purpose for your old festive strands of lights.

### THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM

The holiday season can be joyous, but it also generates a lot of garbage. Americans throw away about 25 percent more this time of year, straining landfills. Wrapping paper, packaging, and food are the major culprits, but discarded lights are often mixed in as well, releasing harmful chemicals like mercury and lead into the environment. Unfortunately, putting them in the recycling bin instead isn't a great solution either since they often contain a mix of glass, metal, and plastic that must be separated before processing. Additionally, their long cords can damage recycling equipment by getting

tangled in it. If you have old lights on your hands, don't lose hope—there are several safer options for getting rid of them or repurposing them.

### TRY SWAPPING THEM OUT

Before giving up on your malfunctioning holiday lights, even if they seem as determined to stay dark as Clark Griswold's in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, you can check for a simple solution. It may be possible that a blown fuse or burned-out bulb is responsible for the malfunction, and replacement parts are likely readily available. However, don't attempt to revive ones with broken sockets, loose connections, or frayed wires, which can create a safety or fire hazard.

## RECYCLE OR UPCYCLE

If it isn't possible to salvage your holiday lights, contact your local municipal waste service to determine whether there is a recycling program in your area where you could drop them off. You could also check whether your local Home Depot or Lowe's will take them; some locations will accept them for recycling during the holiday season. If your lights are still in good condition, consider donating them to a friend, school, or thrift store or even listing them for free on an online platform like Facebook Marketplace or a Buy Nothing group.

Another option is to use your craft skills to repurpose them. For instance, string them across your patio to create extra

sparkle or stuff them into a jar or lantern to add inexpensive but beautiful lighting to your front porch. Or slip a faux flower or brightly colored plastic cup around each bulb to make festive decor for your next party. Creatively reusing these seasonal decorations can give them new life and allow you to enjoy them well past the new year.

*It may take extra work to properly dispose of or breathe new life into your old holiday lights, but doing so will be worth the effort for your own peace of mind and the planet's health.*







# Give Your Home a written by: CHRISTY MURDOCK **Security Makeover**

If you're looking to ensure that your home and your family are both safe and sound, it may be time for you to step up your home-security strategy. Fortunately, doing so is easier and more affordable than ever with new technology and some simple enhancements. Here are nine options to consider as you begin the process of fortifying your abode.

## **Security systems**

One of the best ways to protect your home is by installing a professional security system with a monitoring service. Consider features such as motion sensors, surveillance cameras, and door and window alarms, which can deter potential intruders and alert you when someone within your home is entering or exiting.

## **Smart-home technology**

Advancements like smart locks, doorbell cameras, and other remote monitoring devices provide you with greater control and visibility, even when you're away from home. They may also be less expensive than a professional system and easier to install yourself.

## **Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors**

Though you may already have these throughout your home, you may want to upgrade to newer models to ensure that they're well-functioning. Test them regularly and replace their batteries as needed to keep them operational at all times.





### Home-security assessment

In addition to the above measures, consider seeking out a security expert to conduct a comprehensive home-security assessment. They can identify potential vulnerabilities and recommend areas for improvement. Take practical steps to address their highlighted concerns; even small changes can make a big difference in protecting your home from security threats.

*Enhancing home security is a proactive step toward safeguarding your family and property. By prioritizing your safety and mitigating risks, you can enjoy greater peace of mind and create a true haven for you and your loved ones.*

### Fire safety plan

Take the time to create a fire escape plan and practice fire drills with your family members. Keep fire extinguishers recharged and readily accessible in higher-risk areas such as the kitchen and garage.

### Home maintenance

Regular home maintenance can go a long way toward preventing accidents inside and outside your home. Check for hazards like loose handrails and faulty electrical wiring, hiring a professional as needed to fix any issues. Also, keep walkways clean and clear of ice and debris to minimize the risk of slips and falls.

### Emergency-preparedness kits

Gather first-aid supplies, nonperishable food, water, flashlights, batteries, and other items in several kits

to keep around the house. Make sure they're kept up to date, clean, and readily available in the event of a storm, power outage, or other emergency.

### Child safety measures

If there are young children in your home—or if nieces, nephews, or grandchildren are frequent visitors—make sure that you've adequately childproofed your space by securing cabinets and kitchen appliances, installing safety gates, and educating them about potential hazards.

### Online protection

In today's digital world, online safety and cybersecurity measures are essential to protecting your personal information and preventing identity theft. Secure your Wi-Fi network, use strong passwords, and be cautious when sharing sensitive information online.



# Get Your Home in *Postholiday* Shape

written by: ALLISON GOMES

Holiday celebrations often leave the home in a state of disarray with decorations strewn about, gifts scattered around the living room, and remnants of meals lingering in the kitchen. But by employing a few simple strategies, you can restore order and start the new year on a clutter-free note.

## Clean out your kitchen

Leftovers are great—at least until you realize they take up all the space in your fridge. Before you get too frustrated, toss anything that's older than the USDA recommendation of three to four days. If you have any shelf-stable items you didn't use, consider donating them to a food pantry near you. Also make sure to wipe down every surface to remove any crumbs or grease from the season.

## Organize your holiday decor

Do yourself a favor and be intentional as you pack away decorations. Don't just stuff everything into

random boxes; instead, group like items and label each container so you know what it holds. This extra effort will help streamline the process for next year's decorating.

## Sort your gifts immediately

Go ahead and find a place for all your new gifts right away. This may require donating items you or your loved ones no longer need, but by taking this initiative now, you can prevent your stuff from piling up, which could otherwise keep your home in a state of chaos.

## Do a deep clean

Once all the decor and gifts are put away, spend a day deep cleaning your home. Dust every surface, and vacuum each room—you never know where pine needles, tinsel, or glitter may have ended up. Then reset all your surfaces by putting every item you moved or stored away for the season back in place.



# Give Yourself the Gift of HOME IMPROVEMENT

Got a little space in your budget to buy yourself a holiday present? Go beyond simple gift items and give yourself some extra convenience, style, and even value with these household improvements.

## REFRESH, REPAINT, AND REFINISH

Clean exterior siding, which can build up dirt, fungi, and more. Repaint damaged areas, and add new protectants to vulnerable surfaces like wooden planks. Then touch up your interior baseboards, trim, and walls and swap outdated color choices for timeless neutrals.

## GET WARM AND COZY

To save money on utility costs, request a tune-up on your heating appliances. Have any interior ductwork and vents cleaned, and upgrade windows and doors to models with a higher R-value—a measure of how well a material blocks heat transfer. Seal any drafts around these areas. Also add insulation to unfinished rooms like the attic.


## UPGRADE TO SMART TECHNOLOGY

Install smart features in your home, such as an innovative security system, voice-activated lights, a thermostat you can control from your smartphone, and more. These and other new appliances may offer greater convenience features while saving you money, especially if they carry the Energy Star label.


Investing in these simple home-improvement projects doesn't just improve your daily life but also adds significant value to your home. That means giving your future self a bonus gift of potential extra cash when you sell!




## Front of Tear Out Card 2



**PREP YOUR  
HOME FOR  
HOLIDAY  
GUESTS**





**Stacey Shanner**

Ease your worries and turn your home into a five-star hotel with these stress-free tips to prepare for the season.

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## Back of Tear Out Card 2

**Clean and declutter**  
Give your home a thorough cleaning, and make space for your guests' belongings. Consider clearing out an extra bedroom or linen closet for them to use.

**Offer the basics**  
Provide clean linens, pillows, and blankets for guests, and stock the bathrooms with fresh towels and toiletries. Pack your kitchen with basic breakfast items, coffee, tea, and snacks so guests can help themselves.

**Provide amenities**  
Welcome guests with a holiday greeting card that provides basic info like your Wi-Fi name and password. You could even include a list of local attractions, grocery stores, and restaurants that you enjoy.

**Keep them busy**  
While you cook and set up for a big holiday dinner, offer your guests magazines, books, streaming media, and tabletop games so they stay entertained.

**With these ideas, you can create a warm and inviting space for your holiday overnight guests, ensuring that they can make the most of their stay—and that you can enjoy making holiday memories.**



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# 5 HOLIDAY HOSTING HACKS



**Are you stressed over holiday-season hosting? Don't freeze up—just modify how you tackle it. Here are some easy ways to simplify the upcoming festivities before, during, and after the big event.**

- 1 Make it a potluck.** Don't take on the entire meal-planning process alone. Instead, stick to one main dish and ask your guests to bring their favorite holiday sides, beverages, or desserts. Just keep note of who is bringing what.
- 2 Collect decor from nature.** Rather than shopping for new holiday decor, which strain your budget and schedule, select a few pieces from your yard to feature, such as winter blooms, branch garlands, and pine cones in decorative vases.
- 3 Host a decorating preparty.** Invite loved ones over a few days before the event to help you set up for it. Serve snacks and beverages, and plan a game or movie viewing at the end to celebrate finishing your hard work.
- 4 Set the table simply.** Overdressed holiday tables are costly and time-consuming to set up—and they can crowd diners. Instead, choose simple place settings that work year-round, and finish the look with a vase of fresh foliage.
- 5 Clean up immediately.** Saving all the cleanup for after your holiday party can leave you overwhelmed. Empty your trash can and dishwasher before the event, and as you take used plates, scrape them off and set them for washing right away.