



Home Improvement Projects for the Busy & Broke

HOW TO GET YOUR
\$H!T TOGETHER AND
LIVE LIKE AN ADULT

Christina Salway

Owner of ElevenTwoEleven Design



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Foreword by Monica Pedersen



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Dedication

Holy shit, does it take a village!?! They are not fucking kidding. The number of people who helped make this book possible is epic. The sheer number of hands involved was extraordinary. And I don't mean metaphorically, I mean *actual hands*.

I'd like to dedicate this book to all of the remarkable people who helped make it possible.

To my handy-dandy parents: Who taught me that I could do almost anything, especially if it involved home improvement. And for helping A LOT to make this book a reality.

To my husband, John: Who taught me that I can do even more if I Google it first. We are a real, live love story, plus a hammer. You are truly the best partner, collaborator, and co-conspirator. I thank my lucky stars every morning. Usually after I've had a cup of coffee.

To my son, Jules, and dog, William: You guys are aces too. Thank you for not minding too much when we didn't have a bathroom floor and for thinking it was funny when our kitchen cabinet doors were drying all over our apartment.

To our astoundingly supportive group of friends: Who all acted like it made sense that I was writing a home improvement book, even if I didn't think so.

To John's parents: For teaching us that we could write well and also be decent plumbers.

To my favorite under-thirty DIY enthusiast, Caitie: Because you're keeping us all alive.

To the dynamite team at Skyhorse: Who helped morph this book from stick-figure drawings into something that looks SO MUCH like a book!

But mostly, I should probably thank my mom: Because, seriously, she babysat a lot.



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Foreword

When I think of Christina Salway, a couple of words come to mind: **Creative** and **Courageous!** I met Christina while working as a judge on a glossy, big budget, reality design competition show on NBC called *American Dream Builders*. After completing over three hundred makeovers on HGTV, I was thrilled to be on the other side of the table and given the chance to share with the contestants what I had learned from behind the scenes of designing for the masses. Oftentimes, this meant extremely tight budgets, nearly impossible production deadlines, sixteen-hour days, limited resources, and cameras rolling to capture it all—the good, the bad, the creative, and as reality TV often goes, the ugly. Luckily with *American Dream Builders*, I was behind the judges’ table. As passionate as I am about design and as thick-skinned as I have had to become to work in front of a TV audience, I would never, ever, have had the courage that Christina showed to participate as a contestant.

On the first day of shooting, the producers allowed me to express in a few words what I wanted to see from the contestants. Naturally, as a do-it-yourselfer and self-taught designer, I said, “Don’t be afraid to get your hands dirty!” While this seems like a simple expectation, for this group of designers, it was not. The contestants on the show were a handpicked mix of highly talented and successful professional designers. In their defense, if you have ever had the luxury to hire a designer you would know that you hire them for their experience, resources, and ability to execute their or your own design style depending on how apt you are. In other words, most professional designers do not do your painting, sewing, carpentry, cleaning out, and rearranging of furniture—unless your name happens to be Christina Salway. Of all the contestants, it was evident early on that she had these skills and mindset in her back pocket.

During the first week of touring the “afters” (TV talk for redesigned spaces), I was struck by the most beautiful children’s room that was bursting with pattern, whimsical details, and an unexpected color palette (like all designers, I immediately took note to put this palette into my own designer file for inspiration). When I learned the room was designed by Christina, I quietly said to myself, “This is my kind of girl.” Week after week of grueling—and I mean **GRUELING**—makeovers, Christina “brought it.” Not only was she able to turn trash into treasure (I swear she could probably decorate your space out of an auto parts store), she always delivered spaces with the most beautiful mix of colors, pattern, and texture. And while the whole design world, including myself, seems to be designing in restrained neutrals, it was a treat to see the life and personality her creative design sensibility brought to each space.

On a personal level, her journey on the show was just as inspiring as her designs. I had heard early on from producers that Christina had moved her husband and eighteen-month-old from the East Coast to LA for the show. As a new mom myself with much doubt about going back to work and transplanting my husband, and seven-

week-old baby, I felt both inspired and comforted that there was another mom on our set, with a shared passion.

No matter what challenges were thrown at her, week after week, Christina brought her courage, creativity, kindness, and down-to-earth design approach to one of the toughest design challenges one could face. I learned a lot from watching her, and if you have bought this book, you will too! Yep, I am a fan of this sweet, blonde, skinny-jeans-rocking design dynamo!

Happy Decorating and *Make It Beautiful!*

XO,

Monica Pedersen, *American Dream Builders*, author of *Make It Beautiful: Designs and Ideas for Entertaining at Home*

Introduction

All right. You've decided you're ready to live like a grown-up. This does not mean you have to stop getting embarrassingly drunk on Saturday nights, this does not mean you aren't allowed to spend your weekends watching *Back-to-the-Future* marathons for twelve straight hours, this does not mean you have to start making babies or decide what you want out of life. This only means that you are no longer going to live like an unemployed college student, surrounded by ironic *Onion* articles tacked to your walls and neon beer signs humming over your sofa (we'll talk about your disgusting sofa later).

It's time, guys. It's time to start living like an adult. Even if you aren't really one yet.

In this book, we're going to tackle some big and small projects that are going to make it a little bit easier to live like an adult. You're going to find some simple solutions to clean up your act—just a little—so that your apartment is actually a positive reflection on who you are as a person. To be clear: I'm not suggesting you throw everything away and make your home look like the IKEA version of the creepy murder apartment in *American Psycho*. Your home should not be anonymous. It does not need to be generic or barren. Your home should look like you live there. It should just be a representation of your best self, not your laziest, dirtiest self. Give it a shot.

And if nothing else, you'll be able to tell your aunt, or your mom, or whoever bought you this book that you did one of my projects and it's changed your life for the better. Win-win.



Rules of Thumb: Harsh Words You Need to Hear

A Basic Guide to Living Like a Grown-Up

Living like a grown-up doesn't come easily to everyone. In the same way that you might have a friend who is just always immaculately dressed and perfectly accessorized, there are people with fashion style; people with an innate musical sensibility; people with an intuitive talent for cooking, and likewise, people who just know how to dress their home. Just because these things don't come naturally to you doesn't mean you shouldn't try. That's like resigning yourself to dressing in sweatsuits because you're not as fashionable as your friend. You might never compete on *Top Chef*, but if you practice enough, you might master a decent omelet. Don't quit—just do your best, consult the internet a lot, and when it doubt—the golden rule is always: put it away.

Yep. True story. The first rule to living like a grown up is PUT YOUR SHIT AWAY. And I'm serious. No more junk, no more clutter, no more "But I loved this beanie baby when I was in high school." I don't care.

Take a long hard look at your sentimental tchotchkes. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is there anything aesthetically redeeming about said tchotchke?
- Was it made before 1970, owned by someone interesting, designed by someone fascinating, or in some way unique that merits leaving it out for people to see?
- Does it serve any useful purpose? Does it hold something, hide something, allow you to sit on it?

If the answers to these questions is a resounding "No," it's gotta go. You don't have to throw it away, but it can't stay here. Put it in a Rubbermaid box and store it under your bed, mail it home to your parents, or do the right thing and donate it so some other sucker can have it clutter up their house.

GET IT OUT.

The second rule of thumb is the same as the first one. Now that you've put away all of your clutter and crap, apply the same theory to EVERYTHING ELSE in your home.

Put Your Shit Away

Hang up your clothes, you baby. Wash your dishes when you finish dinner. Put them away. Take out the recycling and put all that junk mail in it as you go. Seriously folks. When I visit people's homes, often times half of the problem is people literally aren't putting things away. When you get home after a long day of work, spend an additional two-and-a-half-freaking-seconds and put your shoes back in your closet. I mean really. I'm not trying to be a nag, but these are the basics. Your apartment will look and feel so

much better if you just keep it organized. And I'm not saying you can't have a collection of beanie babies. But if that's what you're into, display them together, make them a collection—OWN THAT—don't have them scattered all around your apartment like some weird trapped-in-time-teenager-in-a-cat-lady's-body. Once you've put away all your extraneous crap, it will allow the things you've left out to actually shine. It's hard to tell that you love vintage fiesta-ware dishes if they're scattered all over your apartment with varying degrees of mold growing in them. How do I know that you collect antique medical equipment if you've got a twelve-inch glass syringe sitting on your kitchen counter and a broken stethoscope dangling out of your drawer, and between them, miles of dirty clothes and unopened mail? Once you put everything else away, you can start to make a conscious decision about what to leave out.

What I'm trying to explain is that everyone has their own version of what's awesome, and yours doesn't have to match mine. But if you apply these same rules to your weird collection that I've applied to mine, your home will start to look purposeful. Your collection will start to look purposeful. It will start to look like you chose to have your home this way, rather than it just happening to you due to a lack of resistance.

Make Your Bed

Shit. I'm starting to sound just like your mom. But seriously, the next step to living like a grown-up is also an investment in your own happiness. I don't just mean make your bed like pull the blanket up and put the pillows back on it. I mean *make* your bed. Make it beautiful. Make it purposeful. Make it a hotel-like oasis that you can return to at the end of a long day. Put a ton of fucking pillows on your bed so that when you walk past your bedroom, it calls to you. It says "Read a book here. Lie here for hours. Skip brunch and burrow into the peace and serenity you will find here." Yes. That is what I want your bed to say to you.

Start by buying some nice sheets. You do not have to spend a million dollars on sheets to have nice sheets, but go buy a couple of sets of decent sheets. Go to your local discount home store and buy them. And when you do, open the zipper and feel the fabric. Does it feel like sandpaper? Does it feel like a creepy silky by-the-hour hotel sheet? Do not buy that. Your bed linens aren't meant to be funny and shouldn't be so cheap that they're crappy. They're meant to be soft, inviting, and comfortable.

And yes, I did say, "Buy a couple of sets." Because that's the next step to living like a grown up, and again—it's an investment in yourself. If you've got two or three sets of sheets, it means that you can rotate the various sets so they won't get worn out and faded as quickly, meaning that they'll last longer and you won't need to buy a new set of sheets for a longer time. It also means you can wash your sheets and have clean sheets on your bed at the same time. Yep. That's a thing. Maybe you haven't heard . . .

Now we get into the controversial stuff.

Duvet versus comforter: fight to the death.

First, let's clarify what these two things are, in case you're not familiar.

DUVET:

A white fluffy blanket that goes inside something called a duvet cover, which you're then able to remove and wash periodically.

COMFORTER:

A fluffy blanket that has a permanent cover, so in order to clean it, you wash the whole thing, or take it to the dry cleaners.

Assuming you sleep with a blanket at all, your preference for this was probably determined by how you were raised. As someone who was raised with a duvet and duvet cover, I find sleeping with a comforter kind of unpleasant. If I was going to be straight with you, I think it's a little gross. Because you can't remove the cover of a comforter, it tends to get washed a lot less frequently, and my mind ends up imagining gross seedy-hotel-esque conditions where I'm basically sleeping under a blanket of someone else's hair and skin particles. So yeah. In that scenario, comforters are pretty gross. If you think you're capable of routinely washing your comforter, or willing to take it to the dry cleaners to be washed every few weeks, this is the option for you. For the rest of us (slovenly, less prone to professional laundering services), the duvet is the way to go. In my ideal world, you'd also buy a few of these, so you can swap them out whenever you wash your sheets, but they're more expensive than regular sheets, so I'll understand if you only spring for two of them.

Now onto pillows: Maybe I should have explained earlier that I'm pretty serious about my bed. We spend a horrifying amount of time in our beds, and I really think it's one place where you shouldn't compromise. If you have cruddy pillows, change them. If you're not sleeping well, consider a new mattress. Spend the extra money. Get down pillows and a down comforter. I know that sounds bourgeois, which is pretty much unforgivable these days, but you're going to have to find it in your heart guys, because really, the difference is so pronounced. It's what separates the hotel-like-oasis we're trying to create and, well, a Motel 6.

My point here is that your bed should feel like a serene respite. It should always feel like an inviting, wonderful place to end the day, and part of that is making a beautiful bed in the morning so that when you get home—it's waiting for you that way. The pillows are in place. The blanket is pulled up. It looks clean and soft and peaceful. And that's the best way to end your day.

So for fuck's sake. Make your bed.



Honing Your Aesthetic

This one is a real doozy. It's not easy to explain exactly how one hones their aesthetic, but oftentimes I've found that who we are and what our home looks like go hand in hand. If you subscribe to that notion, your home is an extension of your identity. It's the space where you can display the many facets of your self—what you find beautiful, what you find soothing, what you find amusing, what you enjoy doing . . . The challenge is figuring out how you're going to incorporate those various "selves" without making your home feel like a chaotic clown-house. When I work on other peoples' homes, I tend to talk a lot about balance. What I usually try to find is the balance between the "calm spaces" and the "pop spaces." The idea is that your home should feel specific to you—it should feel like yours—but at the same time, it should be more like your online dating profile. It doesn't need to tell me everything all at once. Save some of the gorier details for the second date.

My point is, just because you love movies, doesn't mean your apartment needs to be plastered with the *Clockwork Orange* posters you had in college. Just because you love the color pink doesn't mean your apartment needs to be that color. I guess what I'm

trying to say is that your home should be a tempered, more mellowed version of yourself. It doesn't need to be a literal, physical manifestation of all of your characteristics and preferences.

It's your sofa, not your soul.

Don't get me wrong, you also shouldn't be a stranger in your own home, and that's where the word "balance" comes back into play. Of course you want to be surrounded by things you love and enjoy. You just need to find a way to moderate those things so they don't take over your home completely.

There's kind of a formula to this balance that I like to use when I'm working with people on their spaces, and it's one that I've used in my own home as well. Basically, you have to figure out what's going to "talk." Talk might be a weird word to use, but what I mean is that each space should have elements that are silent, or subtle, and pieces that are vocal, or bold. Finding that balance creates a space that is harmonious without being boring, and exciting without being overwhelming.

For instance—if you've got a crazy rug, tone it down on the sofa. If you've got a zany sofa, maybe keep your wall color quiet. If you're really that crazy about pink, get a pink pillow. Frame your favorite *Clockwork Orange* poster and ditch the rest. In each room, you want places of peace and places of pizzazz. That contrast will allow your brain to rest in between each element of visual interest so that you can actually see and appreciate those exciting embodiments of your personality, rather than getting so over-stimulated that's your brain basically says, "Yeah. I get it. You're kooky," and stops paying attention.

This is not an easy concept to understand, nor evidently is it all that easy to explain. It's absolutely something to be mastered over time, and honestly, I continue to "edit" my own house to this day. My recommendation: when in doubt, go with less. The less "assorted detritus" you've got in your home, the more outstanding those remaining pieces will feel. I think it's better to start with a more austere foundation and gradually fill in over time than to pile all of your shelves and surfaces with the memorabilia from every life experience you've had up until this moment.

The time has come. College is over. You're ready to start being selective.

Getting Motivated

How to go from Pinterest to reality.

This is going to seem harsh, but basically there's an underlying theme here in the first pages of this book. Have you realized it yet? At its simplest, the thing standing between you and your beautiful home—more than financial limitations, more than "not enough time," or "not enough space"—your primary obstacle is you. You have to make a commitment to your beautiful life. Think of it like a New Year's resolution. Like making an oath to go to the gym more frequently. Or to stop eating tater tots after

midnight. Or to learn a new language.

Living in a more beautiful home takes only a little bit of your time. The time required to wash your dishes when you finish dinner. The time needed to make your bed and hang up your towels each morning. The time to put away your shoes and hang up your clothes. And make no mistake, I am guilty too. Six days out of seven (or maybe more like thirteen days out of fourteen) there is a growing pile of clothing “folded” but essentially heaped on my dresser. And then on the fourteenth day, I hang it all up and breathe a sigh of relief/pleasure in seeing my bedroom how it’s supposed to be—sans clothes pile. But here’s the thing: it takes me roughly fourteen times longer to hang up fourteen days of clothes than it would if I just did it when I decided not to wear it the morning of. Like EVERYTHING else. If you actually hang your towels up and put away your bath mat, you won’t have to devote your entire Sunday to doing laundry because your bath mat is filthy and your towels smell like bog water. (Refer to [page 54](#) if you need some helpful hints on how to fold a bath towel nicely . . .) If you’d done your dishes when you finished dinner on Monday, you wouldn’t find yourself spending three times longer chiseling dried, disgusting food off your plates on Thursday.

So it’s not a lack of time.

And frankly, even a lack of money is a shitty excuse. Because although it would be nice if you could deck your bed out with piles of glorious pillows and luxurious bed linens if you don’t have the money for that, don’t. However, making your bed so it doesn’t feel like a flop house costs you nothing. Same with hanging up your towels. That’s free. And instantly transforms your home from careless to thoughtful. Priceless.

Not enough space for your idealized home? Another lousy excuse, honestly. All the more reason to take care of every square inch of your home. Even if you’ve got crappy, filthy roommates—make *your* bedroom an oasis. Hang your beautiful towels up IN your room, and tend to your personal space like it’s a magical fucking garden. Because you might be broke and your roommate might be a slovenly bum, but by god, everyone needs respite from the day. Everyone deserves a haven, goddamnit!

This segues into the next question: How to get motivated? How to stop salivating over Pinterest and Apartment Therapy and really get in there. How do you make the change? In my experience, this is a snowball effect. That’s why I emphasize starting with the little stuff (making your bed, putting your junk away, getting rid of your meaningless and dated memorabilia, hanging up your towels) because I genuinely believe that once you start seeing your home for its true potential, minus the piles and heaps and junk, you’ll feel inspired to keep going, and really start improving.

That’s why starting at *Martha Stewart Home* is pointless. Because it’s like having an out-of-body experience to read about someone hand-making doilies in the shape of ducklings when you’re surrounded by insurmountable piles of junk. You’re like “Doily Ducklings? I can’t even find my shoes! What am I going to do with a damn doily duckling!”

But once your bed is made and your clothes are put away and you’ve washed the seven glasses that were next to your bed—maybe then you can look into your bedroom and realistically think, “You know. My bed would look a lot better with an upholstered

headboard.” And then I can teach you how to make that, and then, maybe you’ll feel confident enough to try something new like that. Because look how far you’ve already come!

My advice: jump in (to the shallow end).

There’s no easy way to get started other than just getting started, but it’s good to begin with something simple. Don’t break into your DIY lifestyle by attempting to build a treehouse for god sake. Start simple. Replace your bed linens. Buy a new shower curtain. Find a funky table on the street and follow the step-by-step instructions to spray painting it successfully. Start to feel the satisfaction and pleasure of making these smaller home improvements and that will embolden you to scale up a little. Remind yourself that you don’t have to go from zero to master carpenter. By jumping into a smaller project, you’ll also start to get more comfortable with the basics before you’re confronted by some of the bigger challenges.

Diamond in the Rough

How to find a really good deal.

Here’s the bad news: the world isn’t what it used to be. For better or for worse. Just as our parents got to camp under Stonehenge when they were twenty, and run unsupervised for hours, riding bicycles alone until sunset when they were only ten years old . . . Those days are gone, and so too is the unbelievably good deal. Whether you blame *Pickers* or *Antiques Road Show*, the fact is everybody thinks they’re “sellin’ a gem” these days. In fact, 90 percent of the time, they think they’re selling something more valuable than it actually is. Because as the old saying goes, “It’s only worth what someone will pay for it.” This isn’t to say a good deal can’t be found—it just requires a little more earnest hunting. But let’s be honest, that’s half the fun, so let’s not tear our hair out about it.

My first hints

- Only buy the truly spectacular—or the exactly perfect—in an antique store (unless you’re in a hurry or have a lot of expendable income.) When you shop in an antique store, you’re also paying for all of that person’s expenses: their rent, gas, the cost of the hotel room when they went to that flea market in Massachusetts. You aren’t just paying for the thing. You’re paying for everything.
- Scour garage sales and yard sales thoroughly. Head into someone’s basement and garage when you’re at estate sales. Dig through the boxes and baskets of junk! Often times the best deals are the pieces a person has forgotten they’re selling, so don’t just take a cursory glance and write it off. You’re going to find much better prices at a yard sale than you’ll ever find at a flea market, antique show, or shop—so it’s worth