

Ep #12: Zone of Genius, Busyness & Mastering Your Natural Gifts with Amanda Gates



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 12.

Welcome to *The Design You Podcast*, a show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth, and joy. Here is your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hi everybody, it's Tobi and I am so excited today for a lot of reasons. First of all, this is episode number 12. Like, time is flying and it is so much fun. This is three months' worth of podcasts. But I'm especially excited today because I'm doing another interview, which is so much fun for me, and I'm sure for you too. And it is with my friend and interior designer, Amanda Gates.

And let me tell you about Amanda because I told her I was going to introduce her as my fengshui extraordinaire thingy friend-y designer-y person, but she's way more of an expert than that because she's actually a fabulous interior designer and she is definitely an expert in the fengshui, which we're going to talk about some today.

And she has a fabulous podcast called the *Home Energy Design Podcast*, which I have been so lucky to be a guest on that podcast. So please, please help me welcome this amazing lady, Amanda Gates, to my podcast.

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Tobi: Hi friend.

Amanda: Hey friend, and you did an excellent intro. So thank you for that.

Tobi: Well, I was just telling you before I started that it's kind of intimidating to intro another podcaster who's like - how many podcasts have you done? Like, hundreds?

Amanda: Yeah, we started...

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Tobi: A lot.

Amanda: Yeah, we started in 2011, so we got a few years under our belt.

Tobi: Yeah, so I was - I'm really intimidating but when you were listening to my intro, I was like, wow she's a real podcaster, like, I'm a newbie. But I'm glad you liked it and I'm glad you're here.

Amanda: Well, thank you. It's exciting to be here, excited to be the fengshui friend-y friend.

Tobi: Oh, I like it. Well, me too because then I get to benefit from all your fengshui expertise. So we did a fun podcast together, an interview on your podcast a few months back, and I'll link to that - I've linked to it before in another podcast but I'll link to it in these show notes too because it was awesome and we talked all about self-care and everything having to do with that kind of idea of putting yourself first. And we might touch on that today but I don't want to just be another carbon copy of our other interview, so we have some other fun topics we want to talk about today. And one of those really was building on the idea of one of my previous podcasts called The Zone of Genius.

And you and I were just texting and emailing - I guess emailing, one or the other, back and forth, and we were just kind of having a friend-y friend conversation about how scary it is to make that leap sometimes to the thing that you're actually supposed to be doing in your life, like, your zone of genius, where not only it feels super good and like you're in flow, but you also make the most money that you've ever made there. So tell me all about - like, let's just jump right into the meat and let's start talking about this and tell me about kind of your business and you sort of - the path you took from not in your zone of genius and forcing everything to kind of, ironically enough, since you do work with energy and the idea of energy, getting yourself in the flow or the zone of genius for your business. I want to hear it. I've heard the story but like, I'm sure I missed some juicy parts so fill us in.

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Amanda: Yeah, so you know, I think one of the nuggets here is that success is never in a straight line, and there's a lot of messy bits that a lot of people don't see. But you have to really not focus on the losses but the lessons that you learn along the way because you emerge with your zone of genius. You really emerge with what you're fantastic at. And I think a lot of us, we just assume that because it comes so naturally and so easily, that you know, that's not something that we can make a living at, we can't possibly charge for that.

So my zone of genius started when my ex-husband and I, we had purchased a home and it was the worst house in the best neighborhood and we had freaking stars in our eyes, we were so excited. It was our first home and I was only 19 or 20 years old. I mean, we were stupid young. And we took it back to the studs and it just felt like crap. I mean, here I was surrounded by all these beautiful chandeliers and all the beauty of interior design, and I was not a professional at this point. And - but it was still beautiful. I obviously had an innate talent at beauty and luxury and all the goods that come with interior design, but it did not feel right to me. I felt like I was suffocating, I felt like I couldn't breathe, I felt like I had just a feeling in my gut, kind of like those butterflies that you get before you go out on a stage. So I went down to Borders bookstore, when they were still around - I'm totally dating myself, but I went down to Borders...

Tobi: That's been a little while.

Amanda: We're talking the 90s here.

Tobi: It's hard to believe we're old enough for anything to have been that long ago, and I'm older than you I'm sure, so.

Amanda: So my thinking is if I can just make it prettier, right? That's like, the motto and mantra every interior designer. "If I could just make it prettier." So I'm down at Borders bookstore and I'm staring at all these amazing like, Bunny Williams and you know, just all of the masters of design and like, it's - I'm sure it wasn't 300 books, but it looked like 3000 books and I'm like, okay, which one is going to be the golden ticket here?

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Tobi: Eenie, meenie, miney, moe.

Amanda: Yeah, and I had this very surreal experience where this woman walked over to me and said, "Darling, you don't need that book. You need those books." And it was the ominous f word, it was fengshui, and I remember - I think this is why Borders went out of business is you could read the whole damn book while you didn't leave the store, right?

Tobi: Yeah, they had like, those really comfy lounge chairs and you could just hang there and like, read the book and then put it back on the shelf.

Amanda: Yeah and I mean, this was before social media, cellphones - now I'm really dating myself - so I had nothing better to do. So I literally sat down and I read, you know, just tons and tons of books and it was like the angels were singing. I was like, oh my god. You know, my house, my front door had been boarded up for over eight months because we had been doing all of this construction. It was a California house, so there was all these stairs to our front door and the stairs were not up to code. So the contractor had ripped off the stairs and like any good contractor, he would like, disappear for two months at a time, and then show up and work for a day and then disappear for two months at a time. And so I didn't think anything about it because I was like, well, I'm on the inside, you know? Who cares about the outside?

So I realized that the reason why I was feeling the way that I was is because our front door had been boarded up for so long and I soon found out that that is what is known as our mouth of qi, this is where all vital energy enters into our home and this is what allows our life and every sense of the imagination, every area of your life, this is where it thrives is through your front door. And it was as if our mouth was wired shut. And so I just remember sitting in that Borders going, oh my god, oh my god. And at the time, I was pre-med, I already had a degree in biology, I had already gotten accepted to med school. I dropped out and went to and applied to one of the most prestigious design schools, and I thought, they are never going to accept me. I have a minor in microbiology and a BS degree in

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biology, and lo and behold, the idiots accepted me. And my space planning instructor, Marcy, was a grand master. And so I knew, I knew that I was on God's path. I knew that this was the path that I was meant to be on and I knew that I had hit flow. And so that's basically how I went down the rabbit hole and that was over 20 years ago, at fengshui.

Tobi: So that's awesome and I love that story. And I don't - if I knew about the pre-med thing along the way, I forgot it, so so fun. But here's my question for you. So a lot of people when I talk about this idea of zone of genius, they're like, "Ooh, I know exactly when I'm in my zone of genius because I'm like, doing," and they'll describe something that's probably like a hobby or it's some kind of charity work. And I get like, emotionally that's your zone of genius, but for today's purposes, I really want to talk about like, your zone of genius as your job.

The thing that not only do you get in flow, but it literally makes you the most money that you can make. And so we talked about privately - well, we have many times, kind of the period between what you just told me of how you got into design and you started your business, and then finding really fengshui again because you sort of moved away from it, as a lot of people do in business, and once you found that sweet spot, then the money kind of really took care of itself. So let's talk a little bit more and kind of fill in that gap for us between okay, now you went to school, you became this designer, you studied under a grand master, but like, life really happens and you start your business and before you know it, you're not working in fengshui at all, right? You're just trying to be one of the many designers or decorators out in the world, right?

Amanda: Yeah, I mean, God forbid, you don't want to niche yourself, right? God forbid, because then you'll pigeonhole yourself and you won't make a dollar.

Tobi: And you might accidentally make some money if you're lucky.

Amanda: You want to be all things to all people.

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Tobi: It's the requirement. It's a requirement as a female entrepreneur that you spend at least the first five years, if not the first 15 trying to be all things to all people while you're broke, right?

Amanda: Oh, without a doubt. I really - I envision this kind of like, getting in a car and driving around in circles for a decade with no map.

Tobi: Mine was more like a clown car because I crammed a bunch of things in there with me. Like, there was no room in the car. Just completely overextended and overcommitted, yeah.

Amanda: Without a doubt. You know, you have this fabulous car, there's tons of really great people in it, there's lots of exit signs, you know, you get on, you get off, you're blowing through a lot of gas, you've seen lots of really cool attractions. I think everyone falls trap to that, right? Like, there's so many bright, shiny objects along the way. It's like, oh, squirrel, oh, squirrel.

Tobi: Yes.

Amanda: And you know, don't get me wrong, there's some really rad attractions along the way.

Tobi: Yeah, for sure.

Amanda: But I think that, you know, if you can imagine, getting in that same car or clown car or whatever and you know, you now have a map and know how to get to the airport...

Tobi: And you tell all those people to get the hell out of your car.

Amanda: Yeah, like you have an Uber come and pick you up and you go straight to the airport and you have reservations and you have a hotel when you get there and there's somebody picking you up and it's like you can now focus. Like, you've been talking a lot about Greg McKeown, it's really getting rid of the trivial mini so that you can focus on the vital few. The vital few is what matters, you know? And so if you're only giving 5% to the 30

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tasks that you're trying to do, you're not doing any one thing well. And so I think that the biggest mistake that we all make when we - first and foremost, we all know what our zone of genius is, right? We all know what that thing is because it comes naturally to us and the thing that I did with fengshui is that I thought everybody would be as freaking excited about it as I was, and I got a lot of pushback. And so I kind of wilted, like a - you know, like a flower that wasn't getting enough sun. I was like, oh, people aren't as excited as I am. And so there was a lot of fear that was wrapped around this idea of fengshui.

But the thing is that for those who were willing to listen and who were even slightly excited about it as I was, I was willing to do it for free. Not only did I do it for free and would give it away for free, if anybody would even slightly show some interest, when you can get lost in something and lose your sense of time, that is your zone of genius. That is what you need to be charging for. That is what you need to be gifting to the world.

Tobi: Yes. So what about all this stuff that was stopping you from - because you said you know, you got pushback and you kind of wilted. So that's what happens. Like, isn't it funny? It's like, this rejection thing. We get rejected from one person and maybe even a person we don't even know or care that much about at all, and immediately we do just shut down like never mind, that's uncomfortable, I knew this wasn't going to work. And we like, put it back in the closet for a while. So what about that? What was that like to, you know, kind of knew you should be working in this place and tell me how you couldn't keep yourself ultimately from being drawn back to what was really authentically you.

Amanda: Well, I think one of the biggest mistakes that we make is especially when we're new, we just graduate from design school or we decide to, you know, go into design, is that do want to be all things to all people. And I think that when you get any kind of pushback on anything when you do try to, you know, share your zone of genius or your specialty is that when you get that pushback, you're now attaching fear and doubt to it. And so that can endow it with, you know, this level of immortality where

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it's like you know that it should be something that you're doing and you know that you're getting lost in it, you know that you love doing it, but then you don't think because of that pushback, that you should be doing it. And so I think that by allowing that fear to constantly assault you, basically, you try to become all things and what happens?

You become jaded, you get pissed off because you're not making the money that you want, you're doing things that you don't want, and now you're burnt out. And how many designers do you know that are burnt out? How many designers do you know that have or creative who have dropped out two or three times and come back to the business? I know a lot.

Tobi: Yeah, well, and I kind of - I really just got chills when you were describing that because I mean, even just thinking about the fact that we believe - we know what we're supposed to be doing, and we know that we're somewhere in the vicinity of the right path, but because we're trying to be all things to all people, we believe that that is what the business is supposed to look like, and we start to believe that even though we are mad as hell a lot of times and we're, you know, exhausted, we just kind of - I don't know, take it at face value sort of or just believe that that's I guess this is what an interior design or any job is supposed to feel like.

So once I get rested, I'll just bootstrap it again and I'll go back and do a whole bunch of stuff I don't like so occasionally I can feel like I'm in my sweet spot. Let's talk about that because I think that people don't think differently enough. They don't think out of - you know, we've so clichéd this term, out of the box, but almost none of the ideas I hear that people think are out of the box or truly out of the box. But I think that maybe part of what keeps us from our zone of genius is the unknown and not really having the courage to go figure out what our own thing, our own version of this thing could look like. What are your thoughts on that?

Amanda: Well, first and foremost when we're talking about the box, one of the things that comes to mind is my grand master that I work under with today, as she always says, "Amanda, you're not in the box, you're not out

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of the box, there is no freaking box." So we're already - you know, when we're talking about what we're doing, she always says, "You're judging your evolution, stop trying to categorize it with your left brain thinking." And she's so right. You know, and I think that Tad Hargrave has - he does this great website called Marketing for Hippies, and he always talks about if you're doing work that isn't built around your natural gifts, you're winging it at something you're mediocre at.

Tobi: Oh, that's so good. Say that again.

Amanda: So if you are doing work that isn't built around your natural gifts, you're winging it at something you're only mediocre.

Tobi: Yes, wow.

Amanda: So think about that. If you are trying to be all things to all people, you're freaking winging it, and you're not good at it, and that's why you're jaded and burnt out and pissed off and not making the money that you want.

Tobi: Yeah, because people just assume that if you do one part of an interior design business, you have to do all the parts that you heard someone else doing. Like, every bit and piece. And maybe your expertise, like, for example, yours is just in one specific area of it that it's so defined, and like, let everybody else figure out a lot of the other stuff where you don't even need a designer for a lot of what we consider part of the interior design business, they can get that online or at a retail store, somewhere else. But yeah, that's so good. If I really could encourage anything, it's just really for people to have the courage to think about their own business in a way that they make it fit what works for them, what they love, what lights them up, what they're really good at, and peel away the rest. And I think that's what you're saying.

Amanda: Well, comparison is a thief of joy, right? I mean - and I think that's another big pitfall for a lot of new entrepreneurs in general is that we look at others that are further along or they're doing something differently or they're

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doing something better, or wait a minute, they're only 30 and I'm 45, why are they - you know, there's all this self-deprecating self-talk and so I think that you have to be able to look at this as why did I go into business for myself. I had a coach tell me this years ago when I was working under Ali Brown and her crew. They said to me, the whole reason you get out of corporate or stop working for somebody else is so that you can play by your own rules. So why are you still playing by the rules?

Tobi: Oh, that's so good. Like wow, you're just giving me like, nugget after nugget. Like, that's huge.

Amanda: I got another one for you.

Tobi: That's huge though. Okay, don't forget it but let's hang there for a minute. That is - like, that's one of the most profound things I've ever heard in this idea of why are you making your business just look like everybody else's even though there's like, 80% of that that you detest? So why are you playing by the "rules" of your industry, whether you're an interior designer or a lawyer or some other creative? Of course, legally you might have to play by some rules of the law, but just as far as the way you craft your services and your offering, and how you design your day and what you spend your time doing. And I mean, I was guilty too. I spent so many years doing more than a full day's work of a bunch of stuff I hated so that I could then in my "free time," which was, you know, usually between 11pm and 3am, do what I actually wanted to do. Wow, okay, that's huge. Why are you playing by the rules?

Amanda: There is no box.

Tobi: Yeah, there's not a box, there are no rules unless you make them for yourself. And if you're constraining yourself by the "rules," the only thing constraining you is you. So good. Wow, okay, what's the next one? Give it to me.

Amanda: So because of that, you know, you're trying to fit yourself in a box that doesn't adhere to whatever your zone of genius is or what your best

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gift is and how you can really serve. You know, if you're trying to adhere to somebody else's rules, then you aren't serving. Your hands are tied. You know, you're not giving in the best possible way, which is why you're burning out. So that is why you need to get into your zone of genius or your niche because there's riches in niches.

Tobi: Yes, and people are so dang afraid of like - they're afraid of it. Like, what are you afraid of? And you can always go back. I mean, nobody ever had any trouble adding more into their life, I don't think. It's the constraining part that is so scary. I just said this on another - recently on a totally different topic, but the other podcast interview I recently did with a guest on my show, and - but just talking about the idea of when we peel stuff back, even though we don't even like what it is, we're so attached to it and we feel like we're losing if we have to give something up. And I did a lot of work with my own life coach about this, about the fact that giving all that stuff up is not losing, it's really gaining. Like, my gosh is it ever gaining. But yeah, why is that? Why do you think that is that we feel like the minute somebody tells us we can't have everything all at one time that we're like, "Wait a minute, what? But you know, I want all that stuff," even though 80% of it is something I detest. What is that?

Amanda: Well, I think it's a matter of is it something that you really want or is it something that you're told that you think you need or want, right? I mean, our culture is - we are so caught up in the busy and we're so caught up in the fraught of if I'm not busy and I am not doing something I'm not productive and I'm not important. And also, we are all pushing down issues and we're dealing with anxiety, we're dealing with stress. I mean, our culture is more drugged out than it's even been, and so when we have all this energy that we don't know what to do with because we're anxious, what do we do?

We just get more busy because then we don't have to deal with it. So I see this a lot in my fengshui practice is that a lot of my clients are dealing with enormous amounts of anxiety and it's because they are not dealing with the issues and really putting in the self-care that's necessary for them to sit still

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and there's this fear around this idea of just sitting still. And that's what I was talking about a little bit ago was that when you attach fear and doubt to your decisions, to the things that you're doing in life, you are endowing them with immortality. You're giving them power. So by doing that, you are allowing it to continually attack you and so it's like you're running from it. If I continue to run and I continue to be busy and I stuff more in, it won't catch me.

Tobi: Yeah, I've just been doing a whole bunch of stuff on my - oh gosh, as you know, I'm constantly working on myself, it's my favorite thing to do. But really continuing to dig in, even though I felt like I had made so much progress in the last two years, especially with my own schedule and my own calendar, I knew I still had like, some underlying - what I call gunk. You know, some thoughts about time and how to use my time and so I wanted to get under it and what I realized is I still had this kind of notion that I was fighting against time every single day like I was in a race. Like, the minute the alarm clock goes off, like, I better have my shoes on because my feet have to hit the floor because I'm in a race from morning until night against my calendar, even though I had in my schedule - even though I had peeled so much stuff off.

You know, if you don't do the work, if you don't do the mindset work behind it, it's not the actions that matter so much, it's the thinking that matters. You can change your actions temporarily but you'll go right back to them later if you didn't change your thinking. So really been digging into this idea and I have finally, finally feel like that I have, you know, rid myself of this thinking that the time, the clock and I are adversaries, that it's my nemesis and that like, my job is to conquer it. And once I did that, it changed everything. Like, it was really going from sort of a scarcity mindset about time to an abundant. Like, I have all the time I need to do what's most important. And wow, was it a game changer. Huge.

Amanda: Yeah, it's funny. Dr. Mary C. Neal, she's got a great book called the 7 Lessons of Heaven, and she talks about how, you know, same thing, she would hit the ground running and she would just go, go, go, go, go, and

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you know, never really - just really staying in left brain and not allowing flow to come into her life and she was talking about in the book how, you know, time in our culture is a commodity and she says it's to be used, spent, budgeted, and saved. It's all about the time.

Tobi: Well yeah, and I'm been really digging into this concept with my kind of current mentor, teacher, Brooke Castillo, who I learned life coaching from, and she talks about the difference in what kind of all those words you just said, like wasting time, spending time, versus creating time, and that was a real eye-opener for me too in this whole idea of like, you can actually create time in your life and in your schedule. We can't get more than 24 hours in a day, but we can create time and space in our life by the decisions we make.

And even in Essentialism, Greg talks about how making one key decision that eliminates a thousand other decisions, I mean, just that concept right there, talk about creating time. And so much of what's burning us out when we're trying to get to our zone of genius is all of those thousand other things that don't matter. Not just like they don't matter in life but they truly don't matter to your end goal. Like, they don't get you any more money, they don't get you any more clients, but we feel the need to do all these things because we saw somebody else doing it. But yeah, I just love that idea. Like, what is the one decision you could make, whether it was some kind of automation in your business or saying no to a certain, you know, commitment that literally would eliminate a thousand other decisions? Like, have you had that very experience when you've been transitioning kind of from the busyness to the flow?

Amanda: Yeah, I mean I think when you can figure out whatever that thing is that you really are good at and what you - really lights you up and you want to share with the world, I think it's a matter of - in order for you not to - reckless is kind of the wrong word but you know, if you really want to be great at it, you have to get the right tools, you have to find the right skills and the techniques to hone it and really carve out what is going to best benefit you, you know, allow you the time, the money, whatever it is that

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you want, and so I think that if you focus on that, you're no longer driving, you know, in circles for a decade. Instead, you're picking up along the way all the things that's going to help you with your masterpiece.

We all have gifts, we all have things that we can give to the world and give back in big ways that really lights us up and makes us feel good, and like you, a lot of us - and me, we spend 80% of the time doing shit we don't want to do for whatever the excuse is. And so I think that to really get into that place, that sweetness, that area that really makes life beautiful is every decision that you make every day should be how is this benefiting my family, how is this benefiting me, and how is this benefiting my gift. If it's anything outside of that, no. Complete sentence.

Tobi: Well, and really kind of it has to benefit all three because I just recently turned down a - something that would have been really fun, it was a charity opportunity, but it just didn't make any sense for me because I knew what the time commitment was going to be. Would it use my design gift? Sure, but it would really deplete me and keep me from doing the other things that were on my list, my goals. So I think sometimes we get sucked in to going, "Oh, but it really aligns perfectly with one of those three categories," but if it's not at least two out of three, then you know, it's for sure a no. And if it's not three out of three, it's quite possibly a no, right?

Amanda: Yeah, and I think that, you know, one of the best things that's really happening right now is there's a shift in the paradigm and women are starting to really wake up and really starting to realize that we haven't been playing by our own rules. We've really been playing by other rules, and other, I would say patriarchal rules, but you know we'll keep it...

Tobi: We'll keep that for a political podcast.

Amanda: We'll leave that for a political podcast but you know, I think that the idea of really creating a life that's beautiful and a life that really makes us feel great, which does include family, which does include self-care, which does include having a career that makes us so freaking happy to get up out of bed to do because we're so excited to do it, there is nothing

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wrong with that and so many women want that and feel guilt and shame because there's something wrong with wanting that. And I think we have all - we've all dealt with that, right?

We all feel that there's a reason why we shouldn't have it all, the reason why we shouldn't have that. And you can fill in the blank for the why. But I think that the change that is occurring is there's a great book by Peta Kelly that just came out, *Earth is Calling*, and she's talking about in the book, this idea that it's no longer about the fame, it's no longer about making more money or how much money you can make or getting the bigger house. What makes you happy? And so stopping long enough and stopping, you know, the anxiety, the nervous energy that we're driving into 80% of shit that does not matter, and really focusing on the internal work so that you can focus on, okay, I really don't like those things but I love this one thing. How can I do more of that?

Tobi: Well, and I think that that - there were two things that I grabbed onto in what you were saying that I think are important, and I think you kind of just clarified one right there. Because we have to realize and we've already touched on this some but it can't be clear enough to me. Like, we can't beat this horse enough for people to understand that like, just because you want to be an interior designer doesn't mean like, you have to pick up the entire role as you have seen it and do all of those parts. Like, if there's only two parts of that job that light you up, then how do you make just those two parts your career and your day?

And I think kind of along that same line of thinking of not having to take the whole, you know, sort of kit and caboodle the way we've envisioned it is really thinking about this idea of having it all. Because I think that there's sort of a conflict there, like in one sense, we're frustrated that we can't have it all and I agree with you, as women, maybe that we're not supposed to, but at the same time, I think we kind of have to redefine what having it all means for each of us individually. Because I was of that same mindset, and so what that looked like to me was let me go tackle everything that I'm interested in that I might be good at all at the same time, and to me that

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really just kind of left me having nothing because that was that sort of master of mediocrity like you're talking about. So I've really redefined what having it all means for me because it's really only having like, five things is having it all. Like, truly having it all where I'm so fulfilled is more about constraining than it is being able to have everything that's available to me.

Amanda: Well, I think you said the key thing is once again, we're constantly trying to put ourselves in a box that somebody else somewhere told us that we needed to have, with all those goodies in it. But whose goodies are they? And who defined that those were the goodies that we wanted? None of us are looking around going, "But wait a minute, those aren't the cookies that I want."

Tobi: Right. Well, like then Arianna Huffington, when she talks about in Thrive that when she started realizing after she had like, launched whichever one of the - you know, I don't know, however many of Huffington Posts - Germany or somewhere, and she's so burned out she literally faints and cracks her head open and has to go to the emergency room, and she's like, okay, that was literally a wakeup call because I thought trying to live on four hours of sleep was a good thing because that meant I got like, four or five extra hours in my day. And she realized that she's killing herself, and she said, the first thing I did was not what you would think of like starting to cut stuff out of my life that I was doing. She said the first thing I did was just go cut out like, almost all of the crap in my mind on the bucket list that I thought I should be doing.

Like, a well-rounded person would know how to play the piano, and a really cool cultural, you know, chic person would snow ski and do it well and do it every year. And she was like, I just like, took out that list and I literally just started going nope, hate that, don't want to do that, could give a rip about, you know, learning to play the piano. And she was like, it opened up so much space mentally just for me that nobody else even knew those things were on my plate. And I can so relate to that because I'm telling you, there have been moments - I mean, believe it or not, early on I was a biology major and pre-med because you know, woman, let's go be a doctor, let's

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go to the pinnacle of what I thought, you know, I should be. And then there have been moments where I was like, I'm going to run a marathon or six of them and then in hindsight I'm like, I hate running. I'm not running a damn marathon. Like, what in the world?

I like yoga and slow things where I like, lay on my back for an hour and get to rest my mind. But here I am, I'm going to run some marathons, and I truly have had that so many moments in my life that looked like that because I thought that was, you know, inspiring or what the world would - I guess, I mean, without even really being conscious of it, maybe give me accolades or a pat on the back or another feather in my cap or something for some of those things. So having it all I thought was you know, just like her, learning to play the piano and run marathons. And I'm like, I only want to do like, five things now, period. Like, read a book, cook, do yoga, and be with my family and my job, and that's it. Don't want anything else. Don't ask me to be on a committee, don't ask me to go with you to learn, you know, something new. Like, this is my sweet spot and these are the only things I want to do. But it took a long time for me to have the courage to say that and to admit it to myself even.

Amanda: Yeah, and I think that you don't have any freaking idea who you are at 20. You know, you're still figuring life out, and you are trying so hard to impress and influence and make a dent in the world, and you know, I think you have to kind of step back and even if you're a mom, a creative, an entrepreneur, whatever it is that you are, can you answer the question why? Why are you doing it? Why does this light you up? Why are you doing it for yourself? Because that matters. It's not about how you impress your friends or make family happy. Their response and how they respond to you, that's their problem, not yours.

Tobi: Well, let's talk about money because you know, part of the problem is - speaking of guilt and shame and cultural expectations and whole lot of like, unspoken stuff, we also all have this - a bunch of things, not always bad. Some people have some really positive thoughts about money, but a lot of us have a lot of money kind of issues, just in our thinking...

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Amanda: Oh, the million-dollar question. Yes, I mean, you know, I think that I got that initial feedback and I think that you have to be so careful with perception, especially when you're dealing with a young mind. And my perception was that, you know, I got a little bit of doubt and pushback and the whole world was against fengshui. I mean, everyone.

Tobi: However, many billions of people on the planet absolutely in conjunction hate fengshui.

Amanda: All seven billion of them. And so I did. You know, I really played small and I kind of - I always say I kind of wilted, and I think that you have to be able to have the confidence, which can be hard when you're in your 20s, but to really have an understanding of what it is that you're good at and what comes naturally to you. And the one thing that, you know, always came really naturally to me is that when I would really tune into the energy of the space, it was almost as if it was speaking to me. I could almost know instantly that there were marital issues, I would know that there was anxiety, I would know that the child was being bullied or something was going on at school. I could tap into that but I was fearful. I didn't want to be the weirdo, I didn't want people to judge me, I didn't want them to think I was a witch. You know, plug in the derogatory term and that's how I figured everyone would see me. I'd love to tell you that it was like this straight line and it wasn't messy and like, you know, it was magical and pixie dust and like, you know, I blew out of it and I was the fengshui expert. But you know, I was like, oh no, but I'm not, and then I would be like, oh yes I am, oh wait, no I'm not, oh wait, yes I am.

And this is right at the time when I was working with Ali Brown's crew and you know, they were like, what's your lowest hanging fruit and when they found out about the fengshui and that I could read floor plans, they were like, oh my god, this is your lowest hanging fruit. And so they were the ones that really created the launching pad because when they - you know, a lot of people when they hear I read floor plans, they assume, oh well, you're an interior designer, you read floor plans. No, I read floor plans. Like, I can read the energy, I can see what's going on. I read one last week where I

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asked the wife, I said, "Is your husband experiencing high blood pressure?" And she was like, "Yes." And so you know, I kind of went in and out of it, in and out of it, but the point of it is that when I really owned it and what really helped me own it was when I met my new husband, who was my biggest champion of all. Like, he embraces my weirdness, he embraces this weird talent that I have, he embraces the energy stuff. You know, like, the other day he's pulling out of the garage and he's like, "Are you chanting with the trees?" And I said, "Yes." "Alright, I'm going to the gym."

Tobi: And that's the thing. I mean, if people are listening to this podcast and they're like, okay, that lady is way to woo-woo for me, okay, like we're not trying to convince everybody on here to love fengshui because the whole point is when you lean into your zone of genius, like your people that want what your zone of genius is will find you and you will find them if you're willing to share with the world what it is that you truly do, right? So it's not like - I mean, we obviously - I'm sure - I don't know how many people in the world, you probably know the statistics, like, believe in and practice fengshui.

It's not going to be the same number of people that like, have a pet or, you know, have brown hair, of course. It's like - it's definitely a strategy, a niche, but that's the whole point that we're talking about here. And usually there is something that feels weird or uncomfortable or flaky, like say for example, the fact that I just added life coaching to my business. And it was so scary to me to be like, okay, first she was a designer and then she was a business coach and now she's a life coach. Here she goes again on one of her flaky tangents. Every five minutes it seems like she gets a new arm of her business. But really, I'm just leaning in to who I am and I really feel like probably this is the biggest of all of those, the biggest kind of gift is in this area for me. But I feel like a flake a lot of times, I feel like I'm doing something super woo-woo, but that's exactly where I'm supposed to be because I'm making more money and getting more response from that thing than when I try to stay in sort of the safe and acceptable sort of version of myself.

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Amanda: And the over busy and the burnt out and you know, where you're not happy. And I think that, you know, whatever your weird is, whatever your thing is, it's not going to open up until you do fully lean into it. Like, I started working with a PR firm two years ago and I remember when I was talking to Steve, the owner, and really telling him what I did, he's like, "Baby, there's riches in niches and we're going to make millions on you."

Tobi: That's awesome.

Amanda: And the thing is that whatever it is that you're good at, I don't care if you're good at basket weaving, I don't care if you're good at painting, or maybe your best skillset is choosing color, whatever the thing is is that when you truly embrace it and you truly lean into it 150%, your tribe will find you. And so we actually are so selective now with design projects. We only take maybe three a year, if that. We actually just turned down - and that's the crazy thing is now we're getting all these big ass jobs, we're like, "Yeah, no, we're not going to do it." We got one last week that was a \$300,000 budget, which again, would have been something I would have killed for even five years ago, and we're like, you know what, we've got this amazing summer planned out, we're going to putter, I'm putting together a course, I'm really focused on what it is that I'm doing and it's all around fengshui. And we looked at the time commitment and we're like, "Yeah, no, we don't want to do this."

Tobi: That is exactly what I'm doing in my life, to a T.

Amanda: Yeah, and what was crazy is that the woman said to me, "Well we really love what you're doing, my husband and I, and it's really important that we get the energy right, you know, can we wait? Can we get on your waitlist?" And I was like, "Wait, what?" You know, so like, we're telling people no and they're willing to wait, and that is a completely new concept, but it's because we are in this sweetness now of really in the flow of doing what we want to do.

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Tobi: As we wrap this up, what are those one or two or three things that they really need to bring this whole conversation down to, to make that leap?

Amanda: I think you really need to define what it is that you would do for free and you lose time doing because that is how you will best serve, and that really should be your question is - you know, and I tell everybody this. How can you truly serve? How can you really give back to the world in big ways? Because when you are passionate and truly love what it is that you're doing, you will shift the paradigm around you. Your staff is going to be happier, your family's going to be happier, you're going to be happier, the energy is going to completely shift and change around you, and it's going to fill you up and be the greatest gift that you could ever give yourself. And lo and behold, you're going to be happy, you're going to love jumping out of bed in the morning, you're going to be able to putter, you're going to truly love what you do and never have a burnt-out day in your life. So you have to figure out how you can serve. And I think you have to have a support system...

Tobi: Yeah, I love that. I want a goal of puttering. I do putter now from downstairs to upstairs since I work from home. Okay, sorry, I interrupted you, but I just - I wanted to linger there on puttering for a minute. So support staff is number two.

Amanda: Just support system. You know, I think whether that's your husband, your spouse, girlfriend, boyfriend, whatever it is, you have to have a support system and I learned this the hard way. I had - you know, like I mentioned, my husband just was not supportive of me and really judged me, and I think that that hindered my growth in a lot of ways. And it prevented me years of being able to serve. And I think of all the regrets that I have, and for those who are listening who are just getting into whatever their field is, the biggest regret that I have is all of the people that I didn't serve because of fear.

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And all those people's lives that I could have transformed and helped prevent getting into accidents or lowering blood pressure, anxiety, or helping their child, or you know, all those people that missed out on that opportunity because I was fearful. And not really embracing my gifts, being really mediocre for many years, trying to be something else that I wasn't. And just from a fengshui aspect, I always encourage people to do unfamiliar things. Don't stunt your growth by doing things that you're familiar with. Read book that, you know, you might not think that you would like to that would be, you know, maybe not so familiar but could turn out to be extraordinary and shift your way of thinking. Or do something that really gets you out of your comfort zone.

Like, I took flying lessons a couple years ago and it's - when you do unfamiliar, uncomfortable things like that, it can be quite exhilarating and it can really boost your personal qi and your personal energy system. We can get really stuck in our way of life, of living, of thinking, and by doing those kind of scary unfamiliar things, it kind of breaks through the old patterns and that is where I find that I come up with the biggest ideas. And when you're really passionate about something and know what your goals are and how you can truly serve, when you can do something that's kind of exhilarating and you come up with that big idea, then you can really get into flow and then you can really give back. Like, I came up with my course while taking flying lessons and it was because of the flying lessons that I came up with two modules that I would not have done. So you have to learn to play to allow the qi to flow through you so that you can tap into the genius.

Tobi: Well, I love that. And my two takeaways from this podcast are I need to putter more and I need to play more, so those are my goals. Well, thank you so much. This was amazing. I'm not at all surprised, but I'm going to have to listen to this myself as just a - you know, a consumer, multiple times and write down all of those nuggets that you gave me because they were so, so valuable, and I thank you so much for sharing your woo-woo with us and your authenticity and really all these fantastic ideas for exactly what - honestly, I can't think of a better example of really helping people

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understand embracing their zone of genius because if I had picked someone that has a run of a mill job, like, they wouldn't really get it, and because what you do is so unique, I think it just was the perfect example. And so I applaud you in your leap into your zone of genius, and I'm so happy you're having so much success, and I really appreciate you sharing it with all of us and I hope to have you back again soon.

Amanda: Well, thank you for having me and just for all those who are listening, just remember, there's riches in niches, so embrace it. You got it, girl, you got it.

Tobi: Here we go. Okay, well thank you so much everybody for joining us for another episode of *The Design You Podcast* and I will see you again really soon. Bye now.

Thank you so much for joining me for this episode of *The Design You Podcast*. And if you'd like even more support for designing a business and a life that you love, then check out my exclusive monthly coaching program Design You at tobifairley.com.