

Ep #53: Self-Taught Interior Design with Brian Patrick Flynn



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 53.

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.

Tobi: Hello, hello my friends. I'm doing an interview today, which I haven't done in a little while and there's so much fun, especially with this guy. One of my favorite and fastest talking friends on the planet, unless he's decided to slow down since we last spoke. Do you still talk fast, Brian?

Brian: Let's just say subtitles are usually needed.

Tobi: So today, I'm talking to my friend Brian Patrick Flynn. Yes, he's got three names. He's got great hair. I wish you could see him. He's got really, really good hair. You can see him because you can see him on Instagram, which we'll be talking about today. We're going to just have a conversation about all kinds of stuff, so welcome, welcome, welcome to the podcast my friend. Tell our listeners who you are, what you do, because you do everything.

Brian: Well, first and foremost, I'm an interior designer. I'm completely self-taught, so it kind of evolved over the years. I went to college for television and film and I was a producer first and I learned all about interior design by working behind the scenes with production designers and set decorators and eventually, on the weekends, a lot of the network executives who took a liking to working with me on set decided to kind of ask if I'd come take a look at their house.

And the next thing you know, what was just a hobby, like on the weekends, picking out paint colors, picking out fabrics, going to upholstery rooms, after three or four years of just doing it for fun, it became money making and then I kind of combined my self-taught design world with my production world. I've been working both as a residential interior designer and a

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production designer, meaning that I design sets for TV, film, and digital for the past 10 years.

So I've kind of taken a different route than most of my friends who did the traditional method of going to design school, spending tens of thousands of dollars to get their certifications. I went a different route and one of the things that's important to me is a lot of times I usually refer to myself as a decorator because I did not go and get the degrees and the certifications that are needed to move walls and move plumbing, which is all really important. So I'm usually pretty sensitive to make sure that I respect that my traditionally trained interior designer friends have a lot of knowledge in their brains of things that I didn't learn. So I'm kind of in the back door and it's been fun. But I'm still learning. I'm 42 years old and I feel like I'm still a student.

Tobi: You are a baby. You're a baby. Well, all of that sounds spectacular and I think it's so cool. I want to hear a little more and we're going to talk about that, about the production company and the stuff you do and you get this dreamy job of creating the HGTV dream home and you do a whole bunch of cool stuff like that which you can tell us about if you want to. But I don't know, I mean, I hear what you're saying about the self-taught versus the professional degree designer, which I am one of those.

But at the end of the day, I just think the customer wants what they want and I know you can give your customers everything I can give my customers. So I wouldn't - I mean, I get it and I love that you respect people who care, the people who went through it, but you know, I don't really think the customer cares about that a whole heck of a lot.

Brian: Don't you also have an MBA?

Tobi: I went to school for like, eight billion years. I have an accounting degree, which I got first, and then I went back and got an interior design degree, and while I was there because I had so many hours, I had all those accounting hours and it takes four years to do the studios for design school, so I was just kind of like, what the heck am I going to do?

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And I thought about getting some minors and some other stuff and I had this really awesome professor in design who - in the 70s, he had grown up in California, and he had a business degree and he said, "Nobody ever comes through here with a business degree," and so I was asking him what I should do and he was like, "You have got to get an MBA. Nobody ever gets to pair a design degree with an MBA," and I was like, that's actually pretty genius. I wish I had thought of it myself.

But thankfully he did, so I remember calling home because my parents had already agreed to help pay for me to go back to school again because I had one degree, which was sufficient. And I was like, well, I'm kind of an older student a little bit, not really, I went straight back to school, I'll promise to have a job, I'll be responsible and I'm not going to be a freeloader but would you help me pay for school.

And I remember calling my dad and saying, "Okay, now I want to get a Masters, and so then I'll be technically a grad student so we'll pay graduate prices for the next four years of all my college." He's like, "How is it that every time no matter what you do it costs me money?" I'm like, I don't know, I'm just really good at that.

Brian: That's actually kind of every parent's dream, the fact that you're wanting to go on and do better stuff. But I think one of the things that's been really important to me is I went to art school so I learned how to write, produce, and direct film and television. And I think what that really worked in my favor for was basically managing a crew. When it comes to wallpaper hangers, upholstery workrooms, flooring installation people, drywall people, it's very similar when you're putting together a production and you have set decorating people, you have your lighting people, your sound people. You have insurance, you have transportation, you have medics on set.

You have to learn that all these different people you're hiring for a completely different skillset and without one of them, the whole thing falls apart. So it was really good training as an interior designer but I really don't think that I truly considered myself an interior designer or decorator until I

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had my first project published and that was the end of 2007 and it was an outdoor living room. And it ended up being in Atlanta Homes and Lifestyles and also in one of the better homes and gardens special interest publications, and that was when a few friends of mine had said, "Have you considered maybe leaving TV and trying to start a firm?" And the end of 2008, which is when the housing crisis started...

Tobi: Really good timing.

Brian: It was the worst timing ever, but the happy story, not the rags to riches story but the kind of fun story for me is that I had spent tens of thousands of dollars hiring professional photographers to photograph my interiors. This was in 2007 and 2008, with the hope of eventually getting my name out there, being published, getting another person with means to hire me to do a house with a decent budget.

And then what I kept getting back from editors was we're finding that your work is too edgy, it's too hipster, it's too relatable, it's too accessible. And I listened. I didn't get defensive. I listened to them because that's what they do for a living. They have to look at projects and see what fits their audience and I learned a lot about interior designing through magazine editors who would give me feedback.

And one of the really interesting things that happened was the market crashed and Domino went, Gourmet went, all these big magazines that we loved so much in the early 2000s. And I was like, great, I don't even know where to pitch my work. So in 2009, I started a very editorialized style blog and when I say editorialized, it was very much about the writing. Because when I went to school for television and film, writing scripts was a huge part of my education.

I decided to flip the script and I started a blog that was called The Quirky Man and I wrote all about the trials and tribulations of being a self-taught designer and I would run the professional images of my work and I would tear apart the rooms and mention everything that I did wrong, as opposed

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to being like this beautiful wallpaper was \$795 per square foot. I didn't do that.

And what happened was the word authenticity became the most important thing about having a digital imprint and people seemed to really like to come to décor demon and see beautiful images and then see my source things that were from retail stores but also mix them with really high-end fabrics. Then ditch pieces and then some DIY, which in the reality at the time in 2009, you had to design that way.

And I remember even when you and I were both blogging, you even did this one big Cinco de Mayo fiesta. That was when you and I first met and I would do the same thing. I was putting together things that were more relatable and not necessarily super-duper highbrow. I think the timing was right because how here we are and people want to see beautiful houses but they don't necessarily only want to see \$100,000 dining rooms. They'd like to know that there's a few pieces in there they can get without having a medium income of like \$850,000 a year.

Tobi: Well, I think the interesting thing about everything you're saying is it's funny because on one hand you can say well, I'm not a degree designer or whatever, but the most interesting path to me and we can talk about next and now, where the design industry is going and has been going for a little bit. But I think the fascinating thing that comes to mind for me, a couple of things, the way you became so resourceful working in the set design, because that's a little bit different than just spending somebody else's money. You were having to work on the budgets and I'm sure a lot of times, even though they - course, no budget's ever big enough, but it's different. That was a business expense and they were expecting you to make stuff go a long way, right?

There was a lot of resourcefulness in that, which we don't always have at those high-end design projects. We're a little bit more spoiled when we have a client that lets us just kind of do what we want to do. And then at the same time, I love what you're saying. You were sort of probably trying to be

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funny and not offend people by being this self-taught designer but you were essentially engineering exactly what the consumer wants to see today.

Like, what does it look like behind the scenes, what's the not perfect bed look like, what happens when the headboard fell off the wall that you just hung it on? That was so fascinating because you're right, we're guilty as designer and decorators, a lot of times of showing only the highlight reel and it's not believable and it's what everybody always got so mad at Martha Stewart about even though she was amazing, she would only show that part and they're like, nobody could have done this by themselves.

And you did the opposite of all of that. Just sort of by accident or by nature of what industry you were in and where you were coming from, which I think is so refreshing and cool and kind of funny and ironic now on the flipside because now everybody else is like, how do I do what he's doing? And he's like, I was just trying to do - because I couldn't do what you were doing. And it's come full circle in so many ways, right?

Brian: Yeah, I think what happened is we work in a really glamorous industry, but I bet you if there was a reality TV crew on you and your team or me and my team, on installation weeks when our clients are out of town and we're putting the whole house together and we're down to the last day where we're finding the peonies, we're cutting them to size, we're putting in the glass vases, we're editing down all their books to see which books are the most visual. I would say that 20% of my job is actually that glamorous part that you see in magazines.

80% of my job, I'm a janitor. I have cleaned toilets for my clients, I've picked up animal waste from the yard before they get home from a trip to Mexico. We work in a service industry and the stuff that we really do behind the scenes nobody ever wants to talk about because it's not glamorous, but it's 80% of our jobs. I find it fascinating because I love seeing how people truly live day-to-day, doing their true profession. I never would have thought - I've really been calculated in a good way. I don't ever want to just assume

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that every other designer works the way that I do because we all run our businesses differently.

But the reality of it is 13 years into my career now, I still find myself stressing out about line items, knowing that the original design that I pitch will realize itself to about 60% of that original idea because budgets get cut, clients get pregnant, have a new baby, all of a sudden a lot of the money that was allocated towards the game room is now going towards the nursery. It's just the reality of interior design is you have to be super flexible and you cannot take yourself seriously. And one of the most profound moments for me was you did a webinar back in 2009...

Tobi: How do you remember all this stuff? I'm going to start asking you what I did because I don't even remember.

Brian: My brother and I were both born with photographic memories. It's a blessing and a curse, but unfortunately, I remember everything that - I remember almost everything like a Polaroid snapshot that happens in life, except for things that - like, usually if it was something super important like knowing the answer for my SATs, I'd forget it. The cute guy in the football team wore, I know that.

Anyway, what I was going to say is you made this statement. It was when you had that cover of the old House Beautiful where it was the blue room, the blue living room and you had said - and I was still so new at this time. You had made this quote that said once you think you arrived, you haven't. And what you meant by that was - I've also had the cover of House Beautiful and it was an amazing, amazing experience.

But if all of a sudden you start to be like, okay, I'm it, I'm glamorous, I'm one of the glamorous ones, you're done because you just have to keep setting the bar higher and higher because we're in an industry that's constantly evolving. And ever since you mention the things like first dibs, and a lot of these e-retailers, things that used to only be available to us by taking trips to Morocco or taking trips to Paris for our clients who have a lot of means, the reality of it is there's a lot of things that are more open to the public now

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and it's not going to change. And we can moan about it or we can modernize and change. I think both you and I have been very good at just weathering the storm and knowing that the interior design industry in 2019 is not what it was in 1950. It's a different world.

Tobi: Well, I think the thing - that's why you and I have so much fun talking when we have phone conversations just whether they're recorded like this one or not. I think that the thing that is so exciting to me to get in a conversation with you is because we both think in the possibilities and we don't really fear that much because we're like, well kind of as my mom always says, you built it once, you can build it again.

Like, we didn't freak out that we didn't know what we were doing 10 years and we're not freaking out that we don't know what we're doing now. We're like, looking at the opportunities, we're looking at the possibilities, we're both more futuristic thinkers, I think, and we just don't panic. I don't think any of us are sitting here going oh my gosh, I hope things go back to the way they were 12 years ago. We're both like, what cool stuff do we get to do now?

Brian: Yeah. Neither of us are saying let's go back to where we were. It's never going to happen. My nephews and my friends who have kids who are tweens and teens, they look at their phones and they look at their tablets before they look at the television screen. They're watching YouTube, they're following people on Instagram or on Snapchat, and they would much rather see a 15 second clip of something somebody did today than watch a 30-minute-long format television program.

And I am not allowed to complain. When I was in college, I even remember stating, I had this interview right after college where somebody asked me what my dream job would be and I verbatim said, "I would either like to somehow work as part of the design team on HGTV Dream Home, or I want to be art director on MTV's The Real World."

Tobi: One of those things died and one of those things did not.

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Brian: The really funny thing about it is one of my best friends Jamie became one of the senior producers on MTV's The Real World by the time I turned 30. So I actually - both of these things that I wanted to be my dream careers could have been possibilities in real life. But HGTV Dream Home has been my favorite project I've ever worked on because I get to go spend about two and a half months in this dreamy location that I usually would probably never even know of or go to, be involved in building a house from scratch, work with really awesome partners and brands I love and respect anyway, and then tens of millions of people are seeing my work.

And what I usually do at that point, going back to how everything's evolving is if I was to give anybody advice who is coming up right now, I'm 42 and I think I have a lot of designer friends who are in their early 30s who are finally getting their name out there. One of the things now that the digital landscape is so important to all of our success and having a digital footprint, I don't read comment sections. I will reply to comments on my own Instagram feed.

Unfortunately, the reality of it is you could be in a room with 100 people and 98 of those people can come up and tell you, "I love your work, I live for you, I respect you." Two people can say they hate you and the only thing you remember are those two negative people. So I've learned in life in general, especially now being married, that I just try to get rid of negativity. There's too much of it out there. And the other thing is the same - you and I actually maybe could possibly have very similar plans because we like color.

But the reality of it is there's enough work for all of us. There's no reason for us to be competitive with one another because the same person is going to hire - I was going to say you will not hire me but we're both really good with colors. So it's possible we might have clients...

Tobi: But they wouldn't because of our personality type still. It's so much more than that. Somebody's going to want me that's a mom and that's all

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structured and has my accounting spreadsheet, not that you don't do any of that. It's not the same person who's going to be watching your Instagram stories thinking you're a total riot going I've got to spend the day with him, I want him to - there's still so many - if you really take into account what I kind of think of as our designer DNA, it's your style plus your personality plus a whole bunch of other stuff that attracts you and your client. I don't think there is competition, really.

Brian: There doesn't need to be any either. Some of my favorite interior designers are also close friends, yourself included. We've known each other for a decade now and I'm in Texas right now for work and one of my favorite interior designers is Denise McGaha and she has a very different aesthetic than I do and I usually find myself even more inspired by interior designers who have aesthetics that are completely unlike mine.

It makes me want to grow more but I think as far as advice for people who are starting out now in this world of Instagram and Snapchat is I only engage in positivity. So it turns you that you do a post and it's an absolutely beautiful room, I will leave a comment. I will double tap it or hit the like button. First of all, I probably never see a room I don't like because interior designers, what we do for a living is we are hired for our level of taste and our expertise. So I would never go on anybody's Instagram or anybody's social media and for any reason leave something negative. There's no good that comes out of that.

Tobi: Exactly.

Brian: It's a very bad reflection on the person who's doing it. I think one of the reasons I've had a lot of success is I've been transparent from the beginning and been transparent that I'm self-taught and I also think nowadays, people love seeing when other human beings have flaws and embrace them. It makes them more relatable. And the reason I'm bringing that up, it comes back to interior design. A lot of people will always want to know where I got that blanket from, where that ceiling fan came from...

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Tobi: Where'd you get those curtains is what they say to me and I'm like, well we made those curtains. We made those.

Brian: My biggest pet peeve and it's no disrespect to any of these people who are following me on Instagram but when someone says, "Can you please give me a link to those curtains?" Well, the link would be very complicated because first I had to source that fabric, then I had to find out how many yards were available or if I had to piece it together with different bolts, then I had to price it between workrooms and find out what type of pleat, and then we had to find out if the floors were level or not and decided what kind of break we're going to do at the bottom, how we're going to line them...

Tobi: Picked out the hardware, had the installer show up.

Brian: And what I learned from that, instead of making fun of people for not having the education, how window coverings to me are the most important part of a decorating job because they can elevate everything else in the room. I haven't gotten to the point yet where I really don't do affiliate marketing, which has become a new huge source of income for young designers to use these links that tell everybody where they can get everything that you post. I'm not there yet because I want to make sure my interior designer friends, like yourself, who have gone the traditional path, I don't want to do that just yet but the good news is in the future, that may be a massive source of revenue for all of us.

Tobi: I agree. Do it. Leap. I mean, I throw stuff up there that I get an affiliate payment from various things.

Brian: You are a really smart businessperson. I eventually think I will get into affiliate marketing because it's ridiculous not to, but right now I kind of want to get the sign off by a lot of my interior designer friends who would be put off by it, just out of professional courtesy. But bloggers and influencers are doing it and they're paying their mortgages.

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Tobi: That's fascinating. So why do you - go back to that statement for a minute.

Brian: Okay, so traditionally, the way that interior design has always worked for decades is we go out, we source things, we have our own mark up, we have our own price per project. We go to the trade only design centers and we edit them down to three. My process is I usually edit it down to three. I have one that I absolutely love, and then I have one that I would be slightly okay if the client chose, and then I have one hideous one I know they'll say no to. Because I always have to do some type of psychology to make sure - I want them to be heard but I also know what the final product...

Tobi: That's funny. I just pick one. I just show them one option.

Brian: You know, I haven't been lucky enough. People always want to say that they want more options, but what I'm getting at is for my interior designer friends who still abide by traditional world of interior design where they mark everything up, I kind of want to have a conversation with them first just out of...

Tobi: You are so funny. That's awesome. You're like, will you be mad at me if I make money on my own Instagram from selling a product that I didn't buy at wholesale?

Brian: I think just because that's my education. I think it's - is always engaging in audience and wants to make sure that half of my audience is consumers or half my audience are consumers, and half my audience is made up of professionals in the interior design world. So I always try to walk the fine line to make sure everybody's happy and I'm just being myself...

Tobi: I'm going to decide that I'm going to be mad at you if you don't start charging for affiliate marketing.

Brian: Check back with me in 2020. I might have on every post I do.

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Tobi: We're talking a lot about social and anybody that listens to this that doesn't already follow has to immediately. One of the things that I think is so hard for so many people is to put themselves out in social media. You spoke of Denise, she's one of my best friends. She does this really, really well too. I've always been comfortable speaking in public. I'm not as good as you two are yet. I aspire to be as good as you two are on Instagram stories.

But talk to us about that because so many people are so intimidated and they think oh this is stupid and who wants to hear that and literally, you talk about everything from important stuff to nonsense and I am on every word and I laugh out loud multiple times a week at your stories and I usually respond and send you little faces and hearts and things. But I literally laugh out loud when you have someone's child who's like, four, and you're talking about what they think about a chair. It is so good. Is it as effortless as it looks? Are you literally flying by the seat of your pants or is it planned out? What does that look like and how are you just so good at that?

Brian: I think I've learned that a lot of the business that I get is based on my personality and my team. I have - my team is very much a family to me. I've had the same team for 12 or 13 years, the same team that I had when I was working as a television producer. They all learned everything about interior design world by working on remodeling shows with me. So they understand the line items, they understand when your work is good and you know your work is good. And I'm a pretty confident interior designer.

At a certain point, people just kind of want to know the person. Your work sells itself. It's done. You have a name. You, as Tobi Fairley, interior designer, do not need to sell yourself. So what I decided to do is I never really got into Snapchat but when Instagram started to do Instagram stories, and again, when I went to college for television and film, I was a writer. So I knew how to engage with an audience and how to write in a manner that didn't come across snobby, that didn't come across too educational and didn't come across as too flippant. So I always wanted to

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be inclusive and make sure that everybody from all walks of life would have some reason to look at my image and stay tuned.

Tobi: That's my first problem. I need to care more about what other people think about everything. You're so much kinder than I am.

Brian: I think it just has to do with the fact that I did not go the traditional route going to design school, but what I learned about Instagram stories when I started using them was I would watch other interior designers who started to embrace doing video and they would put on a hosty voice, which for years that's what you were supposed to do. But what I noticed is when I would go to speaking gigs and do them, I'd show up with paint splattered on my shirt, my necktie would be tied improperly, I'd be wearing ill-fitting shoes. I'd get up on stage and I would just wing it. I wouldn't have a script. I would have images of my work and I'd tell the story behind the project.

And all of a sudden, weekly, I started to get booked for more and more speaking gigs and presentation gigs. And so what I learned was any time I'm in front of any type of audience, it has to just be the same way I would be if we were sitting in a room and there was nobody there. And a lot of people see a camera, even if it's their own phone and they go into robot mode. They change their voice a few octaves or they elevate their voice like they're hosting a TV show.

In reality, people just want to hear you talk like this and one of the things that I think has been really beneficial for me is I've been living with generalized anxiety disorder since I was 27 and a lot of it had to do with working as a production assistant in television and being at the bottom of the food chain, being the first person to show up at 3:30 in the morning, last to leave at 10:30 at night. The lowest paid, the one that everybody yelled at.

And I started to get panic attacks and I started to have to figure out how to live with generalized anxiety disorder and I never talked about it publicly because I just never thought it was a thing. And then two years ago I started to talk about it and how interior design is the only thing that doesn't

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give me anxiety because it's my passion. I actually get anxiety from very strange things. I have to go to a children's dentist because I have to...

Tobi: And how tall are - tell people how tall you are.

Brian: I'm 6'5. I'm the tallest you can be - you go 6'6 you have to go to a big and tall store but I get panic attacks from going to grocery stores, I get panic attacks from very large crowds in concerts and then also when I don't have a project, which is interesting because most people get really anxious when they're overwhelmed with work. I love what we do so much, to me I find soul in creating homes.

I started to talk about that and my Instagram following quadrupled in about six months and I started to just go with it and I realized that when you have put yourself out there and people know that you're good at what you do, just like celebrities or big stars and singers, when you watch their Instagram stories, you see them cooking dinner at home or you see them taking their kid to daycare or taking their dog to the vet.

Like, I was watching Mandy Moore's stories yesterday and she was taking her dog to the vet and just like me - well, not my dog, but she was showing how the dog knows it's going to the vet. It's in the backseat and it's shaking and she was trying to console it and saying, "We're not leaving you at the vet, we're just taking you to get checked up." I think when things are humanized now and they're done in an authentic manner, it immediately affects your business.

And I don't know if that was something 10 years ago but it is the way of the future. So I think when you are just yourself, words and all, it just - it's really good for business. And it was not like that 15, 20 years ago. You needed to be polished at all time. Now it's the opposite.

Tobi: I love it. So every time you go on, is it - do you sit the night before and think what do I want to talk about tomorrow on stories, or do you literally just - I know some of them are probably totally spontaneous because that's you but is there any planning about the content so that you don't run out of

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things to say or - I mean, I don't think you ever run out of anything to say though.

Brian: So, what I do is it's a gut feeling. It's like, have I talked about this too much, are people sick of hearing about this, does this come across braggy, are there no takeaways in this, is this too much about me, is this too much about someone else, should I be using my big following to put a spotlight on somebody else. So what I do is usually when I wake up in the morning and I'm like, am I going to do stories today. I try to think about what is on my agenda that could actually be interesting or entertaining to watch. Then I also think about have I done that 20 times in the past two months.

And then I'll, for example, one of my friends Alberto just won an award. He's an incredible interior designer in New York City and he won an award and I didn't get to go to the gala because I was out of town. I was in Indianapolis at the time and what I want to do is I wanted to go to the gala to celebrate but instead since I wasn't there, I'm going to do a full day of stories introducing my audience to him with swipe up and also his handle so they could follow him.

Because I personally get inspiration watching other people's stories where interior designers work on their projects. So I like to use my platform to also help raise everybody up and get my other friends who are interior designers larger digital footprints and bigger followings because in the end we all win. So I wouldn't say that I really plan them out. What I do is I just try to curate different parts of my life that people might be interested in seeing and find a way to tell the story where it's not rehearsed.

If I wake up in the morning and it's too planned, I know that - I look at my metrics and my insights and sometimes if the numbers are down - just like you being business-minded. The numbers don't lie. If all of a sudden it turns out when I do travel stories and show people what it's like to live inside of a Nordic farmhouse and there are 27,000 views on a nine slide story, I'll probably do it again. If there are 7000 views, then I've learned my lesson, people are sick of seeing this.

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So really, I guess the best answer as far as how I gauge what my content is going to be, numbers don't lie. I look at my metrics and I see what subjects are performing and what subjects are not and I try not to always make it about me. And also when it comes to Instagram feed, I have this rule that every 12th or 13th photo can be one that has me in it but I like to go a full 10, 11 photos that are just rooms, and that formula seems to be working.

Tobi: I love all of that. Well, I'm okay to look at your rooms but I want to look at the ones where you're talking or you're saying hilarious stuff, when you're on a plane, when you have kids there, when you're talking about food. I mean like, I just want to hear you talk so that's what I vote for.

Brian: Well, I appreciate that because I've never taken a selfie before in my life and that's one of the words that I can't stand. And a lot of people - I'll go somewhere and somebody will be like, "Oh, it's the king of selfies," and my first reaction is, "Are you talking about when I do stories and I have the reverse camera on because I'm doing a confessional?" They're like yeah. I'm like, no, a selfie is when somebody uses the reverse camera and it's consistently just taking pictures of themselves and posting them as feed.

And I don't necessarily know that I have - I'm not a fitness expert, I'm not a fashion person. So selfies don't really work for my medium. I'm a decorator, I do rooms. So I guess my reason in saying that is if I'm going to have the camera on me, I'd rather it be for something that is video related that gets to show personality and gets to show like, a fish out of water experience. And that's kind of what I like seeing.

One of my favorite people to follow on Instagram is Sara Blakely. She's that CEO that started Spanx. She is super-duper successful but her stories are just real life what it's like to be a mom, and to me that makes me want to buy Spanx even though I'm not the target consumer.

Tobi: I know you're not. That's awesome. So let's talk about before we wrap up, this has been so fun. But before we go, we have to talk a little bit more about our industry and how it's changing and what that means for you. Where do you want to go? Is there anything that's exciting you that you

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haven't done or that you're dipping your toe in or that you're hoping to do? What's that look like?

Brian: I've always told myself - I'm 42 now, but I always told myself by the time that I hit about 48 or 49, before I hit the big 50, I would love to get away from the intensity and stress that is being inside people's homes to make most of my income. Like, working as an interior designer, I'm at the mercy of the stress level of the person whose house I'm renovating or decorating and their child's school schedule and their work schedule and who's sick.

It's a service-based industry and it can be very stressful. What I'd like to do is I'd like to start focusing more on product design. I have my own line of lighting with Crystorama that's doing really well and I'm hoping in the next year or two to have furniture and fabric out there in trade only showrooms. But I really want to keep learning how to make money while I'm sleeping and I think that's product.

And I've also realized there is something to be said about e-design where people can do - like Betsy Burton who's one of my all-time favorite interior designers has a facet of her company called Instant Space, where she'll design a room for you and ship it to you to do all the ordering yourself. I think those types of ideas are what we should be embracing because the format that we've been sticking with for so many years is dying down. But as far as where I see myself, I would really like to get more into product design and then I've also started to take on a really big interest in the whole Airbnb world.

It's become such a huge industry that I think pretty soon there will be a handful of designers who specialize in partnering with Airbnb owners. It's a brand-new industry and things can't be so personal because they've got to have wide appeal to different people staying there. But if you have just a basic box that you're trying to rent out for a lot of money per night, if you're an interior designer who specializes in things like Airbnbs, I think it could be

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a whole new stream of income. So I'm going to explore that pretty soon. I don't know how, but...

Tobi: I would explore it really soon. I've had that conversation with two people that are in my coaching program and I thought it was genius, and one's in Europe, one's here, but I agree with you. I think the timing is so right for that right now.

Brian: I don't know how we would structure the business model but if most people are buying these locations, let's say they're buying places between \$115,000, \$350,000 in places that rent out a good 40 weeks of the year, I don't necessarily know they would have the type of budget that our clients who make \$850,000 a year would. But they were willing to sink a \$100,000 in decorating and remodeling a few small spaces like a powder room and we were able to do 25 of those a year and have them only take a week or two to do, maybe that's the model of the future. So I really want to explore that.

I don't know that I want to be an Airbnb owner yet, but I think I would like to learn how to become an Airbnb designer, start those projects, finish them quickly, and know that there's no real true person with specific taste living in the home. It's people who are going to be there for three nights, which is a whole different type of interior design, but I think maybe it's a good thing to embrace now because it could become the main source of income 10 years from now.

Tobi: And what I'm thinking when you're saying that is whether we like it or not as designers and whether it speaks to the kind of work we've done in the past, more and more people are okay with that kind of design for their actual home too. More and more people are just like, just make it look good, I just want to have some friends over. Not that the highest end customer is going to feel that way. They want more curated, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if there was a whole huge piece of the population that that actually would be good enough for where they live every day too.

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Brian: Yep, I think that the key to it now is just value engineering. It's certain things that you buy online, certain things that you already have in stock in your own warehouse from other projects, things you're going to have to have built custom, and then sometimes retail. And I've learned that the more and more I'm open about that fact that sometimes the main sofa that I have in the living room is from an actual retail store, the drapery is custom, the rug is indoor-door, the wall covering is expensive. I'm not ashamed of it. I think if you can make a \$100,000 budget look like a \$400,000 budget, I think you're a great designer for that. I don't think you're tricking anybody. I think you're just really good with being resourceful.

Tobi: I agree, and I think you do that really, really well. I think you do that maybe partly because, like we said earlier, that's kind of a little bit of the job that you do with the set design, with the HGTV stuff, all of that. It's not like every single thing you put in the HGTV dream home is the top luxury level product, right?

Brian: Well, none of the projects that I do, even for production design, can ever be 100% custom because of the timelines. So if it turns out that a house has to be loaded in on August 15th, it's never going to push back. You're working in the entertainment industry, it's going to happen on that day. So if it turns out I really wanted those custom draperies to happen but it turns out there is a place online that has ones that are similar in color, that are lined but grommeted without a tailored pleat at the top, I will go ahead and do the grommeted drapery to make the timeline. But then, what I might have to do at that point is dress the room with a little bit bigger budget on greenery.

So yeah, to answer your question, none of it, the houses I do in real life or production design are ever 100% custom because the reality of it is budgets get cut and timelines have to be met and, you know, when it comes to custom, you're hoping that your workroom will finish things on time. A lot of times, for practical reasons, it's smart to have some e-retailers who you rely on. And it's also smart to have some vintage stores nearby that always have something you need.

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And to me, that's where we're headed. Not everything can be custom anymore. For a very select few it can, and that's my dream, but I've learned that maybe only 10% of my projects are totally custom.

Tobi: But I love what you're saying, because you're used to it, it doesn't freak you out. You don't have a meltdown, you don't completely – well, you might – but you're not completely panicking. You go in a job, as you said, knowing that maybe 60% of what you had in your head is going to come to life. And I think that that makes you a better designer and problem-solver for your client, where a lot of other creatives and designers get so fixated on I didn't get to create my vision, they won't let me do what I want to do, they won't spend the money, this can't be a portfolio picture. And clearly, all of them turn into portfolio pictures for you and they look like a million bucks. So I think that that is a great lesson for people to just not sweat some of that stuff and use their creative chops to figure it out, and that's so inspiring and just dang smart business. So you're ready to go for the future.

Brian: Well I appreciate it because I know that a lot of designers do like the idea of getting things from their favorite brands and their favorite vendors, and a lot of times, we only feel comfortable knowing those trusted brands and the quality of them are in the rooms that we have our names on, which is very important. But there's a lot of regular retailers and e-retailers out there who I've had incredible success with. And if they are going to keep me on budget and on timeline, what happens is a lot of designers will then focus on, but that side-table's only this \$49 table that I got from this place or that place. Well, the reason you were able to have a \$7000 piece of art which is the star of the room is because you have the \$49 table.

And most people walk into the room and they're looking at the \$7000 piece of art, so I've learned that it's not all about brand name and about being able to name-drop, I got this at this place or that place. At the end, it's the sum of its parts, and if the room is beautiful, nobody's going to care that you have a \$120 coffee table that you found on the side of the road. They don't. It actually makes you a better designer for being able to make it look so beautiful.

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Tobi: I agree 100%. Well, thank you for squeezing me into your schedule. You're always jet-setting all over the place, and I watch you on your stories and I'm like, wow look where he is now. Now I get to have a conversation with him. Do I get to meet him like for an hour in between fancy things and fun friends? And we pulled it off.

Brian: Yeah, just 50 minutes ago I was downstairs in the hotel lobby here at the South Congress Hotel in Austin having drinks with a friend, and now I came to do this with you, and now I'm going to go out dancing for the night.

Tobi: Well, I will be sleeping while you're dancing, but thank you for joining me. It was so much fun. We'll have to do it again. We always have so much fun and it goes by so quickly because you're just easy to talk to and I love it. So, have a good time dancing and I'll see you again really soon.

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Okay, friends, so I hope you loved my interview with Brian today. He's so much fun, as I promised. And if you want to know anything about him or how to find him out on the web, check out our show notes and the links on the podcast page and I will be back next week with another great episode, and the week after that I'm bringing another really fun friend and I'll have another interview for you, so stay tuned for that. I'll see you really soon, bye for now.

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