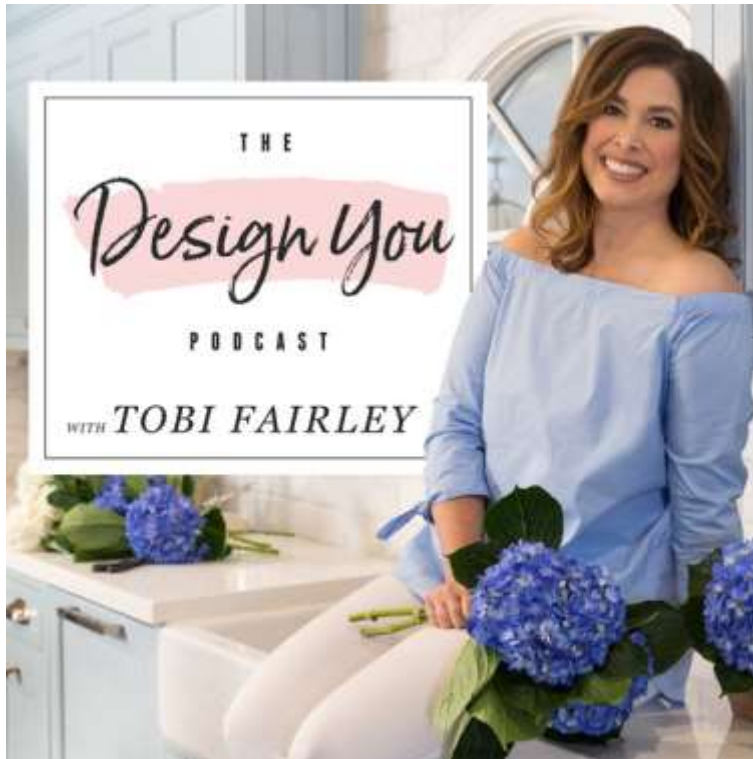


## Ep #63: Thinking Progressively and Standing Out with Stacy Kunstel



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Tobi Fairley**

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 63.

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.

Hey there friends. You are going to love today's episode. It is so full of goodness in every sort of way. It is an interview with my friend Stacy Kunstel and she wears so many hats in the coolest industry. She's in the magazine industry, she's a stylist, she's a magazine editor, regional editor. She has her own company with her partner Michael, Dunes and Duchess that create products for the home industry.

Candelabra, and sconces and tables and everything you can imagine with the coolest point of view, and she's just really super smart and progressive and I had the best time talking with her. So I'm not going to spend any more time telling you about it. I'm going to let you hear it. So sit back and enjoy my interview, my conversation with Stacy Kunstel.

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Tobi: Okay, so I'm so excited, Stacy to have you on the podcast today.

Stacy: Finally, Tobi, I'm so excited to be here.

Tobi: We both have busy schedules. Yours is busier than mine now. I've kind of slowed mine down a little.

Stacy: No one is as busy as you are.

Tobi: So we have so much to talk about today because first of all, I've known all the things you did, but when I was really preparing and chatting with you to make sure that we get a clear picture of who you are and what you do for *The Design You Podcast* listeners, it just kind of blows my mind again to see all the hats because you're a stylist and writer and editor and

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product designer and like, a million other things probably. So tell us what those things are really because you're going to know and do a much better job than me of helping people understand the multi-faceted amazingness that is Stacy Kunstel.

Stacy: Well, that's certainly a lot of buildup but first and foremost, I am a storyteller, and I think I figured that out over the last year. My first job was at Southern Living and I actually used to write travel stories and I traveled all over the south and told people stories and put them in a magazine in front of like, 72 million readers, which sometimes changed their lives completely.

After that I started styling, and I've been on the masthead for Traditional Home, Better Homes and Gardens, Country Home, and all of their special interest publications for about 16 years. You can see my work in BH & G and Traditional Home three or four times a year. I was also for about 10 years the homes editor for New England Home magazine and I still do freelance work for them.

I just did my first freelance shoot for Tony Verada for Veranda magazine a few months ago, which was really exciting. And then of course, I have Dunes and Duchess, which I started with my partner, Michael Partenio in August of 2010. And that's also part of the storytelling. We make custom lighting and custom tables, custom furniture of all sorts, but it's really, I think the story behind it that has attracted people to it most of all.

Tobi: Oh, that's so exciting. So we're going to talk a in a little while about the product design because I have a lot of questions about that and you can tell us how that came about and all of those things. But just a little bit of insight for how you and I know each other is that we met because of some of those magazine relationships and a common friend that we have, Adam Japko so created what was originally the Design Blogger's Conference, and now I think it's Design Influencer's Conference.

And Adam and I knew each other because he owned or was part of the group that owned At Home in Arkansas magazine, which also owned New

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England Home magazine, and then I was - one of the two keynote speakers at the very first Blogger's Conference in LA and gosh, that was probably close to 10 years ago now, wasn't it?

Stacy: You wore a black and green dress that was a little A-line skirt and you had the perfect lipstick and makeup and everything. You were a vision of perfection.

Tobi: Well, thank you. Well you know, a good southern girl always has her lipstick on so that's for sure going to happen, and green is my favorite color. But you are very much into fashion, which we hope to have time to talk about that too, so I can see how you would remember my attire, and I remember very many of your outfits as well, which we'll talk about too. But that's how we kind of first started to get to know each other, and then we just kind of kept crossing paths with magazine, with other friends that were in common, and then you got into the product design and we were seeing each other at High Point Market.

So we just had so many interactions over the years and I'm so happy to bring you and all of your expertise and insight to the podcast today because we both share an affinity or sort of a personality of progressive thinking and kind of - even though I hate to say it because it's very cliché, that out of the box, how can we do things differently, how can we make opportunity out of things that look very scary to other humans. And every time we get together, we're like, brainstorming on all of the goodness that is all of that.

And every part of the things you do, from the magazine industry to designers, to product design, so let's dig in with one of the, I think most interesting pieces of that list and that is the state of the magazine industry. Because so many of my listeners are interior designers or creatives, product designers. Other people that have always been highly interested in getting published, especially nationally, and you have so much experience there and you have watched all of that change that has happened over

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those 16 years or so that you said you've been in the business. So let's talk about what you think about what's happening right now in that industry.

Stacy: It's Wild West completely. I mean, if you think the internet changed a lot of things, I mean, publishing has no basis in reality from what it was when I started in it 22 years ago.

Tobi: And so what is the main - I mean, the internet obviously was a huge game-changer there. Is that the biggest piece of it or what else - it's money, what is it that's really had the biggest impact recently?

Stacy: Magazines are supposed to make money. A lot of them actually don't. Southern Accents was a magazine that I worked for a long time ago. It no longer exists. But honestly, that was a magazine that never made money. Coastal Living, which they folded for a few months and now is part of the Meredith Corporation never really made money. Advertising is a really tough game and the advertising dollars that people have, people are just investing them possibly more online or possibly in other types of advertising or marketing than they did before.

They're not as interested in print, and a lot of people who purchase magazine ad pages, the typical ad buyer is like, 27 years old, and so perhaps that person doesn't have the interest in a magazine that doesn't necessarily address exactly what they're looking for. The other thing with publishing companies like Hearst and Condé Nast, the fashion magazines are what made all of the money. And the fashion magazines would be able to support those interiors magazines without there being a lot of conflict. But the fashion industry, they got really hit probably about four years ago and they're not making nearly the amount of money that they used to.

Tobi: So interesting. So one of the first things that I find fascinating is you said shelter magazines are supposed to make money and I think also, interior design businesses are supposed to make money, yet so few of them actually do as well. So I always kind of call it that smoke and mirrors effect and I think that's been true for magazines for years too. They kept

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that outward façade looking so successful while everything was kind of chaos behind the scenes.

Stacy: Yeah, it's a very beautiful world that a lot of people want to be a part of, but it's - there are magazines who can't even afford to put on big parties for their launch issues and things like that now. There just isn't the money that there used to be in that.

Tobi: Yeah, and for a little while I was watching and I know some of them may still be trying to do it, but they were really grasping at all the different kinds of ways that they could maybe make money. Like did they become an e-commerce site, and there's a lot of stuff that has really been attempted. Has anything really kind of gotten a foothold or what do you think the future of these publications are other than online?

Stacy: Well, so there are odd things I think that have happened like Veranda launched a furniture line. I don't know if anybody bought their pieces or they're very pretty and everything, but that's kind of a stretch from it being a magazine brand to being a furniture line. Or there's other things that they're doing, like Better Homes and Gardens has a relationship with Walmart and selling BHG branded products.

So they're always trying to figure out how to get more money out of it. They're not going to get more money out of the print edition itself, especially when you get a thing in the mail that says buy House Beautiful for the next three years for \$12. So there's no money in subscriptions. That is broken and there's no money coming in from the ad pages because advertisers are either scared off because they don't know what direction the magazine is going, or they don't have a great relationship with the magazine, or they've just decided to invest those dollars in a Snapchat series or something else.

Tobi: Well because it can happen in real time. They can reach their audience immediately for probably a whole lot less money and there's just no guarantee that anybody's reading those shelter magazines, right?

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Stacy: Yeah, but we are reading them though and if you look at something that's happened with Hearst and when they let the editor of House Beautiful, Sophie Donaldson go, the next day I think there was a backlash on Instagram popped old House Beautiful and talking about how wrong it was to have let this beloved editor go. Somebody who really, really knew her audience and was engaged with them and really created a sense of trust, and you knew what the magazine was about.

Now, I'm not saying that's not going to happen with the new editor, Jo Saltz, but it just gave an unease to people when there's that sort of turnover. All of this and you don't know what direction it's going to go or who the new audience is going to be. And selfishly, designers really say that as their own magazine and I think that in the future, it's going to try to appeal to more people who are probably design enthusiasts than actually the design professionals.

Tobi: Yeah, just from a sheer numbers standpoint because there's probably just not enough interior designers. And let's be clear, as we just said about design businesses, a lot of them have not a whole lot of money anyway. They certainly don't have the funds to be advertising at that level themselves. So they may be who were reading the magazine but the numbers really have to cast a wider net I'm sure to go to the consumer and that becomes a big disconnect.

The other thing that happened when the old House Beautiful popped up was the transition that House Beautiful was making in their online space anyway, especially on Instagram. It had pretty much completely abandoned kind of the beauty of the magazine for more of a millennial approach with some real sort of edgy and a little bit irreverent content that I think people were really confused about. And so it just sends the message that we keep seeing over and over again I think that these shelter magazines don't really know what they should be doing. So they're kind of throwing everything against the wall and seeing what sticks a little bit.

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Stacy: No, but I mean when you work with interior designers, I know from hearing your other podcasts and seeing what you do online, you are talking about brand, brand, brand, story, story, story, and you are helping them know exactly who they are and where they stand in the universe and who the people they should be attracting should be. And it kind of blows my mind that magazines have kind of thrown the whole idea of brand out the window because there's a different online brand than there is in the print and there's a different brand with consumers than there is with designers. And there's just no consistency throughout the industry about you don't know what you're going to get, which that does not create for a content that people feel like they have to be a part of.

Tobi: Yeah, it was just reminding me when you were talking about that too, you were kind of enlightening me that I'm sure so much of that is driven from the top down, from the money perspective, of when we watch them combine the editorial teams of every magazine under the umbrella like at Hearst. That has to be for money savings, but then you lose that brand identity and I think it's so fascinating. It was just making me think you know, this is kind of like the consumer.

So if the money guys at the magazine don't really understand the creative, it's kind of like the consumer who doesn't really understand the value of the creative work that the designer does when they're constantly pushing us to the bottom number of the price tag and the budget. That's fascinating.

Stacy: And the other thing is I think the magazines, they are trying to be all things to all people and...

Tobi: Never a good idea.

Stacy: It's never a good idea for anyone. But that's also why if you go to your local newsstand, you'll see all of these niche magazines that you've never seen before. So there's like, Modern Farmer and Sift magazine and Nordic Style and all of these things that are very specific and incredibly well done. But sometimes it's hard for designers to see past the big four, five national magazines that they feel like they need the legitimacy to be in.

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Tobi: Yeah, I think there's a whole shift there and I want to talk about a couple more things in the magazine industry and then I'm going to remind myself to come back to this topic in a second when we talk about the design industry and that whole niche and that whole shift and sort of the aspirations that so many designers have that have always had those top shelter magazines as part of their dream, so we'll talk about that in a second.

Stacy: Can I just be vulgar for a minute? So one of the things that I do is I help people figure out A, what magazine they can be in or need to be in, and then help them try to get in that magazine. Typically, the magazine hires me to do the photo shoot. So 10 years ago, every single architect and interior designer that would send me a project would say well, this is really going to go into AD. I wanted you to see it before I sent it off, but this is going to go into AD and that's the only place where the homeowners want it to be seen.

And even then, I would be like, good luck with that. Call me when you don't hear back from them or whatever. But my criteria now, when they tell me AD, Architectural Digest, I say oh my gosh, that's fantastic. Who is your celebrity client? And crickets. Like, what do you mean? Unless you have a celebrity client, you will not be in Architectural Digest. So there's the first criteria.

And then they say well, then maybe it can go into Elle Décor. It's like, oh, I cannot wait to hear the provenance of all of the blue-chip art that is in that particular house now. Do you have a Rothco? Do you have a Gerhard Richter? Because that's what it's going to take to get you into Elle Décor. They'll say well, maybe it's Veranda. I was like, oh my god, Veranda only accepts epic shit. So you are prepared to show me something that is going to blow my mind, no.

Tobi: I'm laughing but it's not funny. It is so true.

Stacy: And sometimes there are things that designers do but it takes such an amazing client and such an amazing designer and architect and

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landscape architect and all of those forces to come together to create something that can now be in a magazine that is one third the size that it was even five years ago.

Tobi: Yeah, so fascinating. And we just - that's so - oh my gosh, that is such valuable information for people and not that we want people giving up on their dreams, but we just have to change the way we think today. Things are so far different than what they used to be, and I think we hold onto sort of the nostalgia of what things used to be, and that was what happened with that old House Beautiful.

Not that I don't agree with people and I didn't love that too, but some of those things run their course. I think the business models are broken. I think there are so many things broken about it and so as opposed to living in what it used to be, I love the idea of thinking what are the possibilities. One of the things I did want to touch on before we move more into also this whole designer conversation and the design industry is one of the cool things that just recently happened for someone that's a friend of both of ours is this fascinating idea that Clint Smith went back to New England Home from Veranda, and that's unheard of to go back. It's kind of like a...

Stacy: Unheard of.

Tobi: I mean, it happens occasionally in college football when you go to the NFL and then you come back to college, but almost never, right?

Stacy: Okay, let me just put it in perspective. The head coach of Arkansas, Go Hogs, all of a sudden walks away from his job when - right after they've won the national championship and decides that he's going to take a team in Southwest Texas that's a D3 school. That's kind of it.

Tobi: I wish that we would have a national championship again because the last time it happened was 1964, I think. But in theory, I love this story.

Stacy: You know, just in case you're not a 100% design person out there listening. Un-freaking-precedented and I tell you, I'm so excited to see what

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is going to happen. I mean, I worked for New England Home for a long time. It is a fantastic magazine. It is the thick glossy paper, it is photographers who also shoot for Traditional Home and Veranda and Elle Décor and do books and it's a fantastic magazine that he has the platform to take it to a whole 'nother level again.

Tobi: Yeah, and I think what's so interesting is we all, as interior designers and industry partners got so wrapped up in that aspirational part of the national magazines, but nobody was really admitting, which was the truth I think the whole time that the magazines that were converting sales for designers were regional and local publications the whole time.

Stacy: You can preach to that because you've been in At Home Arkansas and in House Beautiful and in Traditional Homes. So I have a designer friend who was on the cover of House Beautiful and she's like, I never got a single phone call.

Tobi: Yeah, I was on the cover of House Beautiful once and Traditional Home twice and I mean, I may have gotten clients that watched me through all the progression and that maybe just added a layer of credibility. I get that piece, but there was not a phone call that said I saw you in the magazine, can I hire you? There were about 10,000 phone calls that felt like, where did you get that vase? Where did you get that sofa? But not anybody saying please go all in and do a million-dollar home for me. Not at all. Whereas the local magazines, the regional magazines feel so much more approachable to the audience that really wants to hire you so often that those do turn into projects for creatives all the time.

Stacy: Well, one of the things that I've always been told too is that the market penetration for that regional magazine or that local magazine is so much greater than any national magazine has. Not only the number of people who are getting it but also the length of time that it sits around. And I can honestly tell you I've had at least 20 designers or architects come up to me and after they have been in New England Home say oh my god, this

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next client is an even bigger project and it's all because they had seen it in New England Home.

Tobi: Oh, so exciting. That's wonderful.

Stacy: I'm shooting two projects this summer for New England Home and they were the result of the homeowners seeing the previous - the work by that designer in a previous issue.

Tobi: That's so exciting. Well, and as much as we love the glamour as a creative to think of people flying you from across the country to do their projects, which does happen, it's so much more common to have people hire you in your own area because it's less expensive for them a lot of times, it just feels probably a whole lot less intimidating. So many times, when people see you in the national scene, they're like, oh, she's probably too busy, she's probably too expensive.

And so it's fascinating that you can kind of shoot yourself in the foot by getting some of that really more national publicity, depending on where you're located. Like if you're in a small region like me, then if you are focused on something that's much more just down to earth, approachable, doable I think for a lot of those customers. But that sounds like that's the same case for what you're talking about.

So let's talk a little bit about the design industry. I talk about it a lot and I know it's not the only creative industry that's broken. I mean, everything we were just saying about the magazine industry reminds me of the local Arkansas newspaper that has gone - it's been here for I don't know how many years. Probably 100. Just a staple of the community and they've now gone to digital, I think every day but Sunday, which is fascinating and they're saying we hope this works. So it's really interesting.

So it's not just designers that are changing. There are so many industries that have changed in every way, but especially the design industry and so I wanted to talk about some things you and I have had fun sort of brainstorming because it's where I'm heading with some of my content. But

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now that these magazines that designers always aspired to be in maybe aren't even an option for them anymore because of all the reasons you just told us, and other reasons, and even getting published locally is going to continue to be more difficult because now everybody's going to be shooting for the local spots, I think one of the really clever progressive, fascinating opportunities is to leverage your own social media platforms and create original content yourself.

Stacy: You are absolutely right.

Tobi: So let's talk about that because we were talking about it at market standing up in your booth, in your space for Dunes and Duchess and we immediately went into this cool conversation because I was telling you that I was working on some things on my own of creating content and stories. Kind of almost like being your own magazine editor, which is not cheap necessarily because it involves hiring stylists and photographers and videographers and all kinds of things.

So it's not inexpensive, so we'll talk about the money part of it in a bit, but let's just kind of plant that seed for people for what that could look like, and some people that are already starting to do this because you have some neat examples of that.

Stacy: I will say, the future is self-publishing. That's absolutely what I believe, what it's going to be. You're already your own best marketer and cheerleader. It's all going to be how you publish your own work.

Tobi: Which is true for the book industry too, right? Self-publishing has become huge so why wouldn't it translate over into kind of the whole magazine piece and social media?

Stacy: So I will tell you, one of the most forward thinking, progressive people in our industry has also been around probably longer than most people, and that is Bunny Williams.

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Tobi: Oh, I agree 100%. I have said for years in all of my classes and all of my programs and all of my courses that no matter how long Bunny is in business, I'll open a magazine and see a room and I wonder who this new designer is and it will be Bunny Williams every dang time and it blows my mind and I love it. She's amazing and then her thinking and the way she's created her product lines. I 100% agree with you.

Stacy: She is always the best case study, but one of the things that I heard her say, it was probably about six months ago and I can't remember whether she was giving a talk or if it was on a podcast, but she said that she was starting to photograph her own work and that it would be appearing on her own website as a magazine story because she no longer had the confidence that all of her stuff would be published in print. And I was like, if Bunny Williams is saying that, we all have to pay attention.

Tobi: Exactly. And she's also the person who's also saying for a lot of design firms, forget about procurement, which is progressive too. And I mean, I agree with that in a whole lot of ways. And we won't go down that rabbit hole, but just to show people how she's thinking I mean, her whole business has been based on magazine features and procuring product and she is progressive enough to say those things aren't working anymore.

Stacy: And then the next person I would say to watch is Dara - please, I know I'm going to mess up her last name. Is it Capanigro?

Tobi: That's what I would say, yes. But I have to make sure I always say your name right too, so.

Stacy: So Dara comes from Domino to Wall Street Journal magazine, one of the best publications out there in my own opinion, Veranda, and she stepped away from Veranda, which was also one of the biggest a-ha moments that people could be an editor and just choose to leave a magazine when they wanted to. And now she's creative director at Schumacher.

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And she has just really done this amazing thing. They have a Schumacher magazine now and she's actually producing stories with Schumacher content that - it's as good as any magazine, you know, that you're going to see. But it's a magazine just for Schumacher. Whoever does their Instagram, perhaps it's Tori Mellott, they have the Schu-stagram. #schustagram, and that also, it's like a self-publishing thing.

So you think about it as a designer, it's like okay well, I could wait two years, three and a half years or whatever for this to appear in this so and so national publication, or four months from now I could have it appear in the Schumacher bulletin that they put out and they're going to Instagram the heck out of it and they're going to send it out in newsletters. That's a great marketing tool.

Tobi: Exactly. Yes. And Schumacher has such a tribe already that is so loyal and so they're going to so supportive of that content.

Stacy: And I think we all are. I mean, if we saw - it was one of our favorite fabrics or favorite wallpaper was used, there's a high likely that we would regram it or we should share it or we would save it, or we would call our rep for a memo.

Tobi: Exactly.

Stacy: There's a great trio of women in Boston. Jessica Delaney, Jen Talbot, and NoelaniZervas, and they created basically I would call it the world's first Instagram magazine. It's called BijOU. And the photography is all done by Jessica, a photographer. They lay out the pages. They page the Instagram page like it appears in a magazine with a caption, with info, with a headline. Super clean, really beautiful, and again, it's like a reveal of a project for a designer and it looks like the page of a magazine.

And just think about it. I have probably 150 magazines lying on my bedroom floor and if I just had them all on my Instagram, I wouldn't have all of that guilt that I have because I haven't gotten to them yet. One more example, Erin Gates, who does Elements of Style, this past week she did a

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reveal on her website of a project that she had done. So instead of waiting and pitching it to a magazine or doing anything like that, she took it in her own hands and drummed it up a few days before. I have this great project I'm going to share with you all finally on Thursday and boom, did her big reveal on her own website and then again, promoted it through Instagram, through Instagram stories.

Tobi: I mean, and to me, I've been saying this for a little while for people, and not that I haven't absolutely loved the partnerships I've had with my licensing partners and magazines and all the things I've done, I wrote a column for a whole year for Traditional Home a couple of years ago. All been amazing, but at the end of the day, the only way to really build your own audience, to build an email list and all of those things is through your own platforms that you control because by being in Traditional Home, I don't suddenly get all of those emails that they get.

Those are theirs. I don't know everybody that's seeing it, and hopefully some of them come over and follow me and start connecting with me online, and it has happened some, but not at the same rate I don't think as when you take things into your own hands. And if you can consistently really leverage those platforms with your own content, I just think that's where all the power is.

Stacy: Well, I really think that brands should really take advantage of this and brands like Stark or Visual Comfort, or whoever it is, or Dunes and Duchess for that matter, and when a project is finished, the brand itself or the company pay for the photo shoot with the interior designer and say well okay, this is content that we're going to share through all of our channels because you have represented our work so beautifully in your project and publish it that way. And I will not be surprised if more and more things like that start happening. It exposes you to different audiences too.

Tobi: Yeah, and some of those people you named like Visual Comfort are doing a good job at asking to use your photography. I think that sometimes it rubs the designer just a tiny bit or they're just a little unsure. They're like, I



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paid for these, is there anything weird - like I have people ask me all the time that are in my programs, is it okay if I share this with Visual Comfort? And I always say as long as your photographer is okay with it and you give them credit, of course, because it is great exposure.

But if those companies were able to put the money behind it, where they were helping pay for those things and producing those things, that would really be interesting to see what happens. Fascinating. And we also talked about - so one of the people that I'm starting to work with is a stylist, Elizabeth Dimos that works with a lot of magazines, and she's the person I'm working with to create original content. We're working on that a little bit this summer but mainly starting this fall.

But also something that's fascinating that just popped up is that Eddie Ross has created essentially like a facility or a studio for this very thing to happen, which I think is so cool. And I'm sure at first it may have been mainly for magazines or brands, but it's very much something that an individual, a design firm could use and it's got like a kitchen setup, I think he'll build props and sets for you for shoots. He has all of his props and collectibles that he and Jaithan have collected all these years.

And I think that's so fascinating too and smart because that's a lot of what holds people back from the - it's a barrier to okay, I get creating original content but if I don't have enough projects or work right now, what could that look like? I'm not Emily Henderson. I don't have a staff of however many she has, I don't know, 30 people or whatever, 10, whatever it is that are constantly creating content for me, and I think that we'll start to see more and more people including people like you that are stylists that could play this role for individuals to create just about any kind of story you want to create, with a facility like Eddie's or other facilities or your own projects or your own home.

Stacy: And again, it goes back to the story because there's one thing about having content and there's a completely other thing about having content

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that has a story. So it's really - it starts with the story before anything is planned, styled, built, photographed. There has to be a story first.

Tobi: And not just a story but a story that you know there's an audience for maybe or is it any story?

Stacy: You know what, I used to think like, well you have to create content for this type of person. People really love mud rooms, so it's got to be about a mud room. You know what, I think if you're creating original content that resonates with you, there are other people that it will resonate with as well.

Tobi: Yeah, and if you start putting out the stuff that's so authentic to you, that's how you build that tribe of like-minded people anyway and then it really starts to kind of mushroom because they love what you continue to put out.

Stacy: Think about all the white kitchens you've ever seen. If you go on Pinterest and you did white kitchens, and they all look the same. One white kitchen after another. And the person who's going to do that purple kitchen, it may not be your jam, but it is going to stand out and you're not going to forget it.

Tobi: Yeah, one of the people that does this so well and it's actually where I found and met - I mean, I had met her once before but I was reconnected with Liz is Brian Patrick Flynn because he does such a wonderful job of this and she helps him - he creates the beautiful content and he's a set designer in his own right and production company and all that, but she helps him because it's a big job to tell all those stories in those projects.

And that's the thing that she - whether we're creating something from scratch, she and I, or we're going into my finished projects and creating an entertaining story, a kid's room story and a product story and other things all right there in that same backdrop, the possibilities are endless and like you said, it's a story. It's a kid's room story. It's a backyard story. It's a food story. It's a collections story. I mean, there are a million options.

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Stacy: And it's a point of view. And the point of view is what's so important. You have to have a point of view for people to think that you're authentic, to think what you're doing is important and good. You have to have a definite point of view.

Tobi: And I think you also, whether we like it or not, you've got to have some money to do this stuff too because you and I have spoken before about how so many people - and you said you were surprised as you would learn how many designers and creatives you've worked with continue to really function on a shoestring budget and any more, I think we've got to figure out how to monetize what we're doing. Not just this new content, but like, make more money in our day-to-day business operations because we've got to have money to create the marketing, the content, the reach that it's going to take to thrive in the future of really, any industry. Not just design.

Stacy: You know, I heard a talk by the guys who have Madcap Cottage and they were talking about their Brooklyn home that they sold a number of years ago but they actually built a marketing plan around that house, and that house appeared in the Wall Street Journal, on the cover of House and Garden, in two different books. There were pictures of it in Traditional Home, and I think there were also pictures of it in like, Russian Architectural Digest.

But they created a marketing plan around that one house to get the maximum amount of exposure that they could get out of that, and I thought that was - instead of designing 10 houses and having 10 different ways of putting it out there, they just did this one house and thought of every single way that it could be marketed.

Tobi: So was that their Brooklyn house or the little school house that they owned?

Stacy: I think it was the Brooklyn house. You know what, it could be the High Point house. It could have been the High Point house actually because I think it was on the cover of a Susanna Salk book that was shot

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by John Besler. And then the kitchen was in the Wall Street Journal, the whole house was again in House and Garden UK. So they really got everything out of it that they could.

Tobi: I love Jason and Josh. They're close friends. I need to definitely have them on the podcast soon and let them talk about that because it's so fascinating. And I mean, even just thinking, it's so funny. Years ago, I mean a long time ago, I did this little tiny showcase house outside of Little Rock near hot springs and a little retirement community and I'm telling you, it was basically a probably 1500 square foot kind of track home without a single piece of architectural detailing, nothing.

It was literally like, a cookie cutter patio home but the people that were doing - it was for I think March of Dimes or something and a friend asked me to participate and I was like okay, fine. And so at the time, it was when Traditional Home had just started playing with video and doing those little tip clips videos that they were doing. Remember those when they started those with the little QR code?

And so I was watching what they were doing and I was like okay, this is fascinating. I'm just going to go put my money into this project, and you know, even a show house like that, I probably spent who know what, \$30,000 because you always do. But I made sure that I did some DIY things, I bought some vintage lamps and had them painted. We did a lot of fun styling. It was the time when everybody was loving all the Amy Atlas candy bar looking styling. I did some of that.

And I shot the videos on my own with my video guy and I presented it to Traditional Home and it was also a - it wasn't lead certified but it was definitely made with a lot of sustainable products and they wanted us to do things that's a lot of the reason for vintage and other things, and I pitched this to Traditional Home with the videos and I literally got a four-page story on sustainable design.

It was this mint green and orange color story that was like, very hot, right that moment, and then they used all of those videos - because I was just

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like, well, this is cool and this is progressive. I'm just going to take this in my own hands and I'm going to go pitch it to Anne and see what she says and it was four pages of content. And that thing has - it's starting to look a little dated now because it was a while ago, but gosh, it had legs forever. That kept showing up and kept showing up on social media.

And it was all just kind of orchestrated like you're saying and pitched. And so if I can do that with a magazine, we can certainly do that on our own social media, on our own websites, with all the amazing technology there is out there. Even doing things on Facebook Live. I mean, there's just a million things we can do and that's why to me, when everybody else is scared and freaking out about the state of the industry, of magazines and design and creatives and other industries, I'm like, y'all, there has never been as much opportunity right now ever.

Stacy: We live in a highly saturated media environment and that's a very exciting thing to have on our side in this.

Tobi: I agree.

Stacy: And one of the things I tell when we're shooting, if a designer or architect has hired us personally to go out and style and shoot something for him that he is then going to want to pitch to a magazine or put on his website or in a portfolio or whatever, I always tell them, I'm like, let's walk around the house together and I want you to take your iPhone and take details of all the things you love in this house because that - it's not just snapshots for memory book. That's content. That's content that you can share later in your stories or on your Instagram or show other clients.

A photo shoot is not just about showing up with a stylist and a professional photographer and some lights and making it happen. There's a whole environment of things that can happen on that day just besides those 15 or so shots that are beautiful that you're going to have forever.

Tobi: Yeah, and I think just when you were saying that, it was also reminding me in general of the value of a stylist, which I didn't always

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totally believe in. I wasn't against it but I've always been relatively good at styling my own projects. But when I shifted and started using other people, I think I had Southern Living brings in their stylists. You don't have a choice, and when I worked with House Beautiful, Robert Rufino flew to Northwest Arkansas and Francesco Leniezi or if that's how you say his name, it was dreamy and that was when I was on the cover.

And I watched them work and I really started to understand like, it really matters. It matters so much, and that's again where you can't do this stuff on a shoestring. And as you start to create original content, the difference and what turns so many of us off of thinking of the DIY original content versus beautifully professionally produced original content, those are completely different things, and a stylist is a huge piece of that I think.

Stacy: Okay, so here's the example. I can never be an interior designer because I can't see things the way you see them. I only see things flat. Like they're in a magazine. So I don't see anything three dimensionally. So when I walk into a house, I immediately know the angles that it needs to be shot from. When we're working with a designer, it's very stressful because the designer feels like they have to make a lot of decisions.

I completely remove the designer from having to make any decisions other than letting us know does this look and feel the way you want it to look and feel. So it's about creating that and about seeing things in a very different way than a designer is typically able to see. And I will tell you, the emotional baggage that comes with a designer into a house that they've designed is sometimes enormous.

Maybe there were arguments about the budget, maybe the owner chose a different rug that you didn't like or whatever. I know none of that, so I have no judgment as to why things are the way they are. But you're always thinking of that history.

Tobi: Right. And so we would maybe veer away from shooting something that we didn't was that great when it could literally turn into what I would call the money shot and be on a cover because you could see it differently.

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I think also the - because you've worked so hand in hand with editorial teams and even the advertising teams, the whole process of working in a magazine, you are so much more skilled at knowing what the customer wants, knowing how to break things down into the way they would like to receive it that we don't really understand.

Because a lot of times we think well, the customer, the end user, the consumer, they just need to know my point of view, but it doesn't always work that way. And so if we don't meet them where they are, it's not always going to translate or resonate, and I think that's another reason to have these other professionals that are used to working with the end product of the production piece.

Stacy: At the end of the day, you want to be able to look through all the photos that you did with a professional photographer, and for those photos to tell a story without ever saying a single word. Showing how the rooms relate, one to another, showing how there's a consistency in the colors or the textures or the light in each room, and it should tell you a story in your head without ever writing a word down.

Tobi: That's awesome. I love that. Okay, so let's talk about - speaking of point of view because we've got a couple of other things that you and I were both - well, I was interested in talking about your products for sure, and they have a very specific point of view. So you can tell us how that came about and then let's kind of parlay that over into just kind of the whole point of view, niche, strategy conversation you and I are both interested in and some of the exciting things we're seeing people do in our industry and vendor - industry partners

Because I think so often, as I'm trying to help creatives understand how to be more specialized, they get in theory what that looks like, but they just can't imagine what it looks like for them. So let's start by how did you imagine this whole concept of Dunes and Duchess? Where did it come from? And you keep a very, very specific point of view with that product line.

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Stacy: I can tell you and you're going to hate hearing this, Tobi, you're going to hate this. It was so unplanned. It was so unintentional. It was just merely going with the flow.

Tobi: Like you couldn't find something you needed or you just felt like making a craft project one day or like I'm bored, let's get some spindles and paint and whip up something in the garage?

Stacy: My partner Michael Partenio is a professional photographer and has had a photo studio since he was 17 years old. He is an amazing photographer. And I worked with his as a stylist and when the first - when the magazine industry hit the skids like, 2008, 2009, we went from traveling four, five days a week to not going anywhere for like, a month. It had never happened to us in our careers that we had this time on our hands.

He's a very inventive, crafty type of person. We had been on a photo shoot in Florida and he had seen an antique second era Napoleon candelabra that he had fallen in love with. So he had taken some pictures of it and he started sketching on the plane on the way home and I didn't see him for a few days. And he had gone to upstate New York to visit a wood turner to turn a candelabra based on this antique that he had seen.

And he got back and he was like, feeling pretty serious about me wanting to be my boyfriend and everything like that and I was like okay, and he presented me with a candelabra and I was kind of like, what's this?

Tobi: A ring, a candelabra, I don't know, what does this mean?

Stacy: Weekend in Miami or something. But I get this candelabra and I'm kind of like, well, this is interesting and we had some designer friends see it and some other people and people were like, this is really cool. This is really different. We've never seen anything like this before. It's really kind of strange but we like it. And then somebody said you should do the New York Gift Show.



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It's this big gift show in New York that they have twice a year and you should show that to people. And so being set designer minded, we crafted this little tiny booth and covered the walls in burlap and wore our very island like clothes and we had two products in two colors. So basically we had four things that looked exactly the same in our booth. We had two candelabras and I had a lamp without a shade that was made from a candelabra. That's all we had. I look back at it now and I'm like, you've got to be kidding me. And Barney's placed an order.

Tobi: Oh my gosh, that's so amazing.

Stacy: And from there we made them in our living room, we made them in our garage for probably a year and a half and we had designers say well, I really love the candelabra but I really want you to do something that I can put on the wall. Can you do sconces based on the candelabra? So boom, we started doing sconces. And the sconces were the real game-changer because...

Tobi: Yeah, I used those in my New York holiday house one year and they look so good. I loved it.

Stacy: But the idea was that the sconces we typically think of as something brass or nickel or eight years ago there weren't a lot of choices, and here we were doing something that was this really interesting shape. You could make them in any color you wanted it to be. So you have dimension and color on the wall. But for how Michael and I design things, which is also odd because I don't draw. When I draw, he makes fun of me, so I don't draw.

But what we do, we figured out that we do this best if we're in the car and he's in one car and I'm in a different car and we have a conversation together. And I tell him...

Tobi: Okay, that's fascinating. Why do you have to be in different cars?

Stacy: Because we don't pay attention to one another if we're in the same room. We're too busy trying to do our own stuff. So if he's in one car and

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I'm in the other and I'm saying, sweetheart, I'm thinking about like, a shelf and I'm thinking about as tall as I am and it can probably hold about 20 books on each shelf and it would have spindles like this and I start telling him a story about a product that I think we need in our lives.

And in his head, he's sketching it and engineering it because he's the final say about is this going to hold together and is this physically possible. But I'll honestly tell you, everything that we do, not even intentionally, it just happens this way, it all relates back to that first candelabra. The wood turnings, the colors, the feeling that we want things to have, and it's a very specific type of view. It's very seaside, it's pretty.

But when you do one of our things in black, it goes anywhere, it looks very urban. We ship dining tables to New York City, to San Francisco, to Chicago, to Gulf Shores, Alabama. Our stuff goes all over because there are people who also like the feeling that they have and they know that we're making it and it comes from us.

Tobi: And that's part of the storytelling and also just that point of view, that niche approach to you know exactly who you are, you don't waiver, and you said it has just really blown your mind how much that company is just growing and blowing up right now when so many other parts of the industry are having the opposite result I think, and I think it goes back to that very, very specific point of view, don't you?

Stacy: It really does. You're absolutely right in that. And I think when we first started off, with a couple of things, I was like, well let's make it safer, let's make it appeal to more people. I don't even think about that now. I'm like, no, you know, it's something that we love. If we love it, there's someone else out there who's going to love it too.

Tobi: Which goes back to that tribe mentality and that authenticity that we need in our point of view on social media and everything else because when we're trying to be all things to all people, which I want to talk about that for the design industry for a second, we're trying to be generalist

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because we think it's going to give us more options of customers. It does the exact opposite of that.

Stacy: As an example that I use on Instagram, if you do #interiordesign there are like 7,500,000 people who've already used that hashtag. To use that hashtag is like pissing in the ocean. There's no reason to do it. Now, if you said Little Rock Luxury Design, there may be only 123 people who've every used that hashtag. That is going to be so much more effective than if you have just thrown it out to an ocean of people rather than keeping it pond-sized.

Tobi: Yeah, and one of the things I struggle with getting through to people, it's really the mindset work that I do in my coaching program now because I went literally and became certified as a life coach, not only for my own personal benefit, but because I knew there was such a mindset piece that were holding most of the people back that I worked with that couldn't get the business tools, the ideas, the concepts that I know work to convert for them. It was always that mindset.

And I think one of the biggest hurdles people have – I just was talking to somebody about it today in the program, is this whole idea of a niche strategy and specializing. And you said, when we were chatting also and prepping for this call, that you used to have a completely different approach, even when you first entered the magazine industry because you do all these different things now and wear all these different hats. But within each area that you work in, each hat you wear, every one of them is still very niche, very specific point of view. So talk a little bit of that whole specializing mindset that you really came to understand.

Stacy: Well I think I was just trying to fit in for so long. You know, people in their 20s and their 30s, they're just trying to find their footing and be part of something and fit in. And I think when you hit your 40s, especially now I'm in my later 40s...

Tobi: I'm right there with you.

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Stacy: I'm like, to hell with that. I want to be special now. I want to be different than everybody else. And the thing is, the more different I am from everyone else and the areas of expertise that are more different from other people, I may be the only person that people can think about when they think wood turned painted furniture rather than them think of 10, 15, 20 other companies.

Tobi: Yeah, that all do lacquer furniture or all do tables. What did you say?

Stacy: I said it's so important in setting yourself apart. Don't be afraid to be that different person. If you're a designer and every project that you do is going to have a certain signature to it while still adapting to what your client wants, don't be afraid to put that out there. I have a designer friend who I work with and her thing is she only wants to work with bachelors. I'm like, well gosh, say that. If that's your niche right there, you have to put that out front and center.

Tobi: I know, I agree totally. I work with a couple of people that only want to work with that customer too, but even more specific, like a certain type of bachelor or in a certain region or with a certain style or whatever. And I'm just pushing people because we're just a sea of kind of – even at the highest end, it's still people trying to be more of that generalist. I always think about it; the easiest example is to think about the medical profession and are you the GP or are you the plastic surgeon or the plastic surgeon who only does noses or something. Like, that's such a specific thing and you're going to get so much more work, you know. You're going to get a lot more conversion, you're going to stand out for your customer so much better if you're willing to be gutsy enough to go into the one very specific point of view, thing, niche, customer. You can really differentiate in, like, 10 different ways or more in the design industry.

Stacy: And it's not limiting yourself to that particular customer. It's actually opening yourself up to the very best in that type of customer.

Tobi: Yeah, and I think where people get confused is it's not like if you get a client that's not a bachelor that you can't work with them if they're still a fit,

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but that's who you're marketing to. That's how you're presenting yourself so that you can stand out.

We were talking about this because I was saying, you know, I'd love to give some people some examples of what this could look like, and we just happened to kind of take our conversation into the recent luxury home conference that you were part of, which was an extension of the stuff Adam does that we talked about earlier, the blogger's conference or influencer's conference. And you had one of the coolest scenarios to me of a kitchen showroom that you told me kind of their story. Will you tell our listeners about what that company has done? Because I think it's so fascinating to just open the minds of everyone listening, no matter what industry you're in, of how you could create an experience, a point of view, a strategy to set yourself a part.

Stacy: So, Clarke is a company, they have a showroom in Massachusetts outside of Boston and then in Norwalk, Connecticut. But they were one of the first companies to create – they're basically people who sell appliances, but the thing is, you walk into their showroom and you're walking into a series of the most beautiful kitchens you've ever seen that are done by local and national designers. And you can cook in these kitchens.

It's not just the fact that they're there and they're beautiful, but you can bake in their ovens and they do these wonderful things. They bring chefs in to show you how to use these pieces and you can use them – you can actually bring your own pots and pans into the Clarke showroom and cook on the appliance that you may be buying.

Tobi: You said you can even bring your laundry in and use the washer and dryer.

Stacy: So, the very first time I went to one of these and they were washing cashmere sweaters in this Asko washing machine and putting them in the dryer and I'm like, you've lost your mind, this will never work, this is going to come out child-size. And sure enough, the cashmere sweater comes out and it's the lightest fluffiest non-pilled sweater you've ever seen. It looks so

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much nicer than if it came back from the drycleaner in a bag. But you can actually use these appliances in this incredibly beautiful setting. But they took it one step further.

They're thinking about the people who use these appliances and they're chefs and they're homeowners and they're people who love food. And they just bought one of those containers – a pod, basically – that grows vegetables and lettuces in it year-round. So every person who goes to the showroom now, like, walks out with a bag of fresh lettuce that they've just picked. And that didn't add any money to their bottom line, but that added an experience that people are never going to forget and that are going to think is special and that are going to tell other people about.

Tobi: That's amazing. Now, I want to go there.

Stacy: Well, you should do a talk at one of those, absolutely, they would love to have you, I bet.

Tobi: That's amazing, I want to go there myself now. I'm ready to go cook there.

Stacy: They would love to have you. We should do a talk there.

Tobi: That would be so fun. Okay, so, we've covered so much ground today, it's been so, so, so much fun. But the one thing that we have to talk about, you are also friends with one of my besties, Denise McGaha and you both have this love for fashion in common. You've worked with her as a stylist. You've done all kinds of things. But we had fun talking about fashion and style and her personal point of view for style on her episode.

But you also have a very, very specific and interesting and fun and edgy and cool point of view with your style. So speak to that a little bit because one of my favorite things is when I've seen you Instagram, when you're getting ready to go show products, say at High Point Market twice a year for a week in the Dunes and Duchess showroom space, you literally

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orchestrate your fashion and create things and have vintage things made. So what does that look like for you?

Stacy: So you have to be super organized to do High Point because – I'm there for a total of 10 days, so eight of those days, I have to look fantastic from eight o'clock in the morning until midnight every night. I have to be comfortable and I have to be stylish. But when you have your own company and you have your own booth, you also have to stand out.

So for High Point and then the other show that we do twice a year in New York, I tend to be a little more theatrical and I definitely never ever want to have anything that anyone else is going to wear, and I typically never wear the same thing twice. It's got to be super special.

I work with one of my best friends, Bartley Johnstone, who has a beautiful store in Sharon, Connecticut, which is just north of New York City, and we put together my entire week and a half worth of outfits. And I have everything photographed. I have descriptions written on it, like what lipstick I'm going to wear and what my hair is going to look like and what jewelry I'm going to wear. I bag the jewelry, I pack it all up to go to High Point.

And this keeps me hyper-organized. You know, when I wake up groggy on Monday morning after a whole weekend of High Point parties, I never have to think twice about what I'm going to put on or what I'm going to look like that day. It's already planned out.

Tobi: And you mix in, like, a lot of vintage stuff and you all create things and you all add embellishments and you alter things and change them, right? Like, there's a whole...

Stacy: So she's so great about – I always know that it's going to be something exciting that I'm going to love when she says, "Oh my god, you're going to think this is crazy, but I want you to go to Home Depot and I want you to pick out four or five of your favorite types of rope and bring them with you today. We're going to do a whole Max Mara take on the rope around the wrist or rope around the ankles or rope around the waist."

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And literally, I wear things from Home Depot. But I'll fix them with a vintage belt from the 1950s that she has found with a Gianni Versace jacket and some Zara pants and some shoes I got on the rail.

Tobi: That is so amazing. Is it a big investment? Like, do you put a lot of money into that because it's so part of your persona and even your brand for the product, or is it affordable?

Stacy: Fashion and clothes are totally my passion and the thing is, the really fun thing is I will take 10 or 15 pieces of clothing that are already in my closet and I will take them to Bartley and I'll be like, "Let's make these new, like we've never seen them before." We've taken dresses that I wore and then will put a skirt over the dress and then put, like, a little leather vest over the top of that and it becomes something new in a way that I've never worn it before.

I have worn things backwards, skirts backwards. I have worn, you know, it's really about the layering and she's able to take it to another level that I don't always see it at. So it's like having a stylist for your house and being able to come in and do something different with what you already have. That's very much what she does too.

So I will buy two or three or four pieces that sort of fit my theme for the show. And every show that we do, we start from scratch. It's a completely new booth, a completely new color scheme, and all new products or products shown in a different way. I'm never going to show the same thing twice, like so many showrooms tend to do, and that's exactly the way I produce what we're going to wear fashion-wise too.

So this past show, it was all about the pop of red for me, this past show. She took a jacket – I was like, "You know, I really love this long trench coat but I've never worn it. I've had it forever. I bought it at a flea market for like 50 bucks." She's like, "That's great, we're going to turn it into a dress. We're going to turn it into a dress and put a red belt around it, put red lipstick on you, and then you're completely the theme of your booth."



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Tobi: I love, love, love every single thing about that. I mean, I knew a little bit about it, but I'm so glad you explained it. It's so fascinating. Now I'm going to pay even more attention to all of your fashion. So, we will post in the show notes where to find you and where people can follow along and see all of the fabulous Dunes and Duchess products and also, if we can find time in your body schedule, love to have you come do, like Denise and I just did, a Facebook Live in my *Design You Podcast* community on Facebook sometime because I know people would love to ask you so many questions about the magazine industry and about everything, fashion. You'll have to wear something – maybe you change outfits three times during the Facebook Live.

Stacy: That would be a blast.

Tobi: Okay, well we will definitely make that happen. This has been so much fun. And as with all of my amazing guests, because I only try to invite the people that I find the most interesting to me personally, we could talk for, I'm sure, several more hours, but I think we've covered so much amazing ground today. And I can't wait for our listeners to hear it, and I know we're going to get amazing feedback. And I just thank you so, so much for making the time for me and for our audience today to have this conversation.

Stacy: Tobi, you're the best, thank you.

Tobi: Oh, I'll see you soon.

Stacy: Okay, bye.

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So there you have it, friends. Wasn't that so interesting? And my gosh, don't you want to now have everything you wear styled in the same way Stacy does? I know I do. So creative and so cool.

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So just as I said at the end of the podcast, we're going to have Stacy soon as a Q&A interview so you can actually come ask her questions inside the Facebook free community that we have for *The Design You Podcast*. So if you're not already a member, head over and become a member.

You just search for *The Design You Podcast* on Facebook. It's a group and you have to request to join. You answer a couple of questions and then we'll let you inside. And you can be one of the people who asks Stacy anything and everything that you want about the magazine industry, the design industry, the products industry, or her fashion or anything else. So we'll let you know soon when that is going to happen and I'll see you again next week with another great podcast. Bye for 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](http://tobifairley.com).