

Ep #136: Diversity of the Design Business with Thom Filicia



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Tobi Fairley

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Tobi: You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 136.

Female Announcer: 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's your host, Tobi Fairley.

Tobi: I have a treat for you, friends. I have Thom Filicia on the show today. He is so fun. I know you know who he is I don't know how – if you don't, where have you been? Thom is incredible. He's a TV star. He started out on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. I think he says in the show, maybe back in, I don't know, like 2000s or something. It's been a while, but he has done so much amazing things.

He's an incredible designer. He's had every TV show you can imagine. He's been on every TV you can imagine, Oprah and GMA and all the places. He has books, he has product lines, he's even starting a podcast with his buddy, Carson, he tells us about. So much fun in this episode, but Thom just is – he's an incredible business person, he's a super busy guy as you're going to hear, but I think he's really, really thoughtful about how he shows up in the world, how he works.

He's so appreciative of his team. So many amazing qualities this guy has and he's super down to Earth so I know you're going to love this episode. He gives lots of great advice. If you dream of becoming a TV star designer or really growing your business to the level that he has so sit back and enjoy this fun episode with Thom Felicia.

Hey, Thom, welcome to *The Design You Podcast*.

Thom: Hello, hello, hello. I am so excited to be here. What's happening?

Tobi: Well, I'm thrilled to be with you and my audience is going to love, love, love this because everybody loves Thom Filicia, right?

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Thom: I mean, I hope so. That would be awesome if that were true. I mean, I'd like to think so, but I'm single so maybe not everybody.

Tobi: Well, everybody in the design world or that are creatives and I think it's so cool because so many people know you because as – I mean, normally I have people do the intro, tell people a little about – a bit about yourself. I'm skipping that whole part with you because if people don't know you, my gosh. I mean, I remember way before you and I knew each other and were in the industry together I remember watching you on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* which how long ago was that?

Thom: Oh my God, I would say we started shooting that in – I think it launched in 2003, summer of 2003.

Tobi: Okay.

Thom: We were on for seven years I think or something like that, six, seven years – four, five, seven, six years, and then I did *Dress My Nest* on the Style Network for three years and then I did – I was on HGTV for a year.

Tobi: You had like *Tacky House*.

Thom: Yeah, *Tacky House* and *Dress My Nest* on the Style Network and then I was on HGTV for a little bit, for a year, and then I did – then I just did most recently *Get a Room with Carson and Thom*. It's so funny I was just on the phone with him earlier today. He and I were laughing about a new project and just some funny stuff.

Tobi: Well, you're both really funny actually, but that just – the power of TV which is interesting because we can talk a little bit about that, too. Obviously, we're going to talk about design. I think we should talk a lot about just how diverse of a business you have because you have done TV and books and you have your own showroom and you have licensing lines and you have all these amazing projects that are residential and

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commercial. I mean, you've done so much and you're going to start a podcast, I think, right?

Thom: Yeah, we're actually – that's one of the projects that Carson and I are doing together is a podcast. We're actually looking at a new show right now. We actually just shot something for E! in California. I just got back from High Point which was pretty awesome. We couldn't believe we had such a good turnout which was really refreshing to see and see a lot of people from all over the country, socially distancing, wearing masks, being smart, and also doing business. It was really – it was a career-positive thing and we are doing a lot of projects.

My design firm right now is doing a lot of really interesting things which is awesome and we're excited about every single one of them. The showroom – Gabby, who runs the showroom is like, "Oh my God, the showroom is killing it." Yeah, so we're just feeling like it's nice to be able to feel like what you're doing is happening, it's making a difference, it's working, and at a time where it's really nice because I feel like I'm able to support other businesses and other things that need support right now, like restaurants. It all cross-pollinates at some level, you know what I mean?

Tobi: Yeah, it's so good. But that's a lot of stuff. That's a lot of stuff that you do and I want to talk about – so, let's talk about TV first and then I want to talk a little bit about what role you play in those – of all those parts of your business. Because as you and I know, you can't have your finger in every pie all the time running everything. I know you've got a team of people and I'd love people to understand a little bit more about how that works.

But let's start with TV. So, you're talking about a new show with Carson, you keep doing TV and we know the power of TV, but in a lot of ways it's changed, too, right? TV has changed and getting a show has changed. So, talk to us about it.

Thom: Yes, absolutely. I will tell you, I think what we – I kind of refer to it now as media and I call it media because so much of what I exclusively

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used to do when we do television and that was kind of the medium and the only medium that really sort of built that platform. But that platform now shares so many different vehicles, you know what I mean?

We're doing Instagram, we're doing podcasts, we're doing television, we're uploading, streaming, so we're doing so many different things that we think that collectively work in concert to really – first of all, I think as a medium for us to communicate our ideas and for us to I think really sort of have fun with the process of design and the business of design, but also in a lot of ways keep the enthusiasm and the excitement and the interest and the information that people are so interested in regarding design and the business of design and all of those kind of layers.

So, I really think that it's evolving and growing into a much more interesting space than just television because television, which I love and it has been such a big part of what I've done and what we continue to do, but it really would feel one-dimensional and flat if it didn't have podcast, if it didn't have streaming, if it didn't have Instagram, if it didn't have Instagram TV, if it didn't have Facebook, if it didn't have – you know what I mean?

If it didn't have all of these other things that, by the way, are very interesting and thoughtful and dynamic ways for us all to communicate and share information and ideas, solutions, creativity and all of the things that sort of create that spark that get us all excited about doing the various things that we are doing both in our personal and our business lives.

Tobi: Yeah and I think one of the things that's interesting and what I'm kind of picking up on with the way you're talking about this, not just the changes to be more of the media, which I do love, but when I've heard people in the past talk about TV or when I hear other designers wish they had a show they kind of think it's like the big break and it's the thing that's going to make them somebody.

Thom: No.

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Tobi: And it's not, right? And then the people that I talk to that do it are like, "It's really hard work and it and of itself you don't make that much money on a show, in fact, you make very little money," but I love how you're talking about this as one component of a much bigger business strategy.

Thom: Of a bigger concept, 100%.

Tobi: Yeah, that you fully get and you don't go – you didn't go into – I mean, I don't know if you did back originally, but you don't think of it as, "I just got to get a show and then I'll be like Thom."

Thom: No.

Tobi: You know it's one tiny piece of the whole puzzle, right?

Thom: 100% and let me just tell you, getting a show will be the thing that will make other parts of your business problematic. You have to understand that not everybody building a house in Easthampton or in Palm Beach or in La Jolla or in Atherton or in Greenwich or New York City Park Avenue they're not always looking for the designer who's on television.

Tobi: Right.

Thom: You really have to sing a little bit louder, dance a little bit longer, and you have to be doing show houses and you have to be out there because what people see on the television is appropriate for television and they think that's what you do. So, if you want people to know that you're a serious designer you have to also be publishing in various magazines, you have to be in show houses, you have to be an authority in doing speaking engagements, you have to be doing podcasts. You have to be doing things in the industry for the industry that allows people to say, "Oh, wait a minute, you're not just a TV designer."

Tobi: Right.

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Thom: “You’re a real designer. You’re credible. You have a degree. You have an office. You have a team. You have a – “ It’s like I can’t tell you how many people will come up to me and say, “Wow, I love working with your team. Laura is amazing. She’s incredible. Randy is amazing. He’s incredible. Smith, Gabby, Lindsay – “ it’s just like one after the other. Rosalie, I mean, it’s like you can’t believe – without my team, without a team, not my team, without a team – I am part of a team.

We are a team and I think that’s the first thing. We are a team and we all make it possible for us as a team to be at all of our events. You know what I mean? Just like if we were playing lacrosse or we were a swim team or a tennis team. It’s like there really is – without that group it would not be possible.

Now, my role is unique in the sense that I have to – when furniture is being designed I am a part of that process and I’m reviewing, I’m giving ideas and inspiration. I’m being given inspirations and ideas and then we kind of work it out. Then we start looking at drawings, then I start sketching things. I’m sending photographs, they’re sending photographs, I’m sketching, they’re sketching. I’m looking at every single project in the office.

I’m looking at the stone. I’m looking at the plumbing. I’m looking at the furniture. I’m looking at the textiles. I’m looking at the wall coverings. I’m looking at the electrical layouts. I’m looking at the elevations. Now, I am in and out of those meetings. I’m looking at a lot of that stuff sometimes on my tablet in an airport or on an airplane. I’m doing sketches when I’m in a hotel room or I’m in my house up at the lake.

I’ve been doing this since – when I started filming *Queer Eye*, I had a design business and I had about 12 or 14 employees at the time. I couldn’t just quit my job and start to make TV. I had to keep my company moving forward. So, I was shooting a show and then I was going and working in my office until 1 or 2 o’clock in the morning and then up at 6 o’clock in the morning shooting a show and then finishing at 10 or 11 or 12 o’clock at night and going into my office.

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When we were shooting in London everything was FedEx'd and it would come with the FedEx box in the FedEx box and I would do everything, then I'd put it in the other FedEx box and give that and then it would go back to New York. So, I mean, it was a real – you have to really, really, really, really love what you do and really be passionate about what you do because it's a lot and I would say that anything that you love to do isn't really like working.

So, when I'm doing all of that stuff, for me, it's like I have – sometimes I'm getting ready to go out and I'm reviewing things and I'm putting them in a thing where I'm sitting or I'm shooting them digitally now and I love it. I wake up in the middle of the night thinking about it. I jot ideas down next – I keep a pad next to my bed so I can write things down or sketch things in the middle of the night so that I can go back to sleep.

But I love it. I certainly am not complaining about it at any level, but I will say that when people are like, "Oh my God, with being on television your biggest break." I literally – my thought is like I don't want to ruin the enthusiasm and the dream, but I also – I do say to people I say, "Look, television has been one of my favorite things about the many, many, many different components of my career, but it does not come without – there are the pros and the cons that come along with it. There are the blessings and the curses that come along with it."

You have to be understanding of those things and you have to be willing to say, "I'm going to offset these things. I'm going to make sure that this thing that comes along with this that could hold me back doesn't and if it does it wasn't for lack of trying." I will say this, there are a lot of people that get – they could be an attorney, they could be a politician, they could be an actor, they could be a designer, a lot of people become well-known and they not only turn into somewhat of douchebags, but they also kind of lose themselves in that and they start to forget that – they think that this is a reality and it isn't a reality.

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It's an interesting part of your career that will ebb and flow, that will be powerful, and less powerful, and more powerful, and less powerful, but you really have to be a person that is grounded and has a sense of yourself, knowing yourself and knowing that you do and what you love to do and understanding that that element is something that when it's there it's great if it's managed properly and when it's not there it's great because you have more time to manage the things that you need to manage and when it comes back that you're ready to utilize it in a way where it is beneficial to you as a human, as an individual and as a professional. Being recognized sometimes can really eat people up and spit them out.

Tobi: Yeah. Well, that's one of my favorite things about you because you're so down to Earth. You're so friendly and down to Earth and genuine and you're always the same no matter if I see you – we don't know each other that well, but we've spent some time together. We did a project together at Pandora's, and we had a sleepover with everybody.

Thom: Yeah, oh my God, we went to a slumber party together. Girl, you know me.

Tobi: We did. We did, but the thing about you is you were just as friendly the day I met and I felt like I knew you and you were genuine then as every time I see you or talk to you or do things like this with you and that speaks volumes about you. I do think it's interesting what you said about how TV can even make you have to overcome some things

Because I will say, I was just thinking back and I was like, you know, I probably did at some point before I knew Thom, I probably did think he was a TV designer and I probably – maybe until I really started seeing your work I might not have thought you were the level and quality of designer that you are and your work is phenomenal and blows me away. I mean, it is such good work.

Thom: Oh, thank you. That's awesome.

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Tobi: I do think there's –

Thom: And I love your work, too, by the way so it's a mutual thing.

Tobi: Well, thank you. But I do think there probably was a moment where, if I'm honest, if I think back that I probably would have also judged and been like, "Oh, he's one of those TV people not a legit person." So, that's interesting that you had to overcome that stereotype.

Thom: 100% and the thing was is that that really was a thing that kind of slowed down my business at some levels and at the same time pushed other things forward in a faster way.

Tobi: Yeah, like the product lines and stuff you mean.

Thom: The product lines I think for sure. But the thing was is that a lot of those product lines when you get in there you see people get into that space and then you don't see them again.

Tobi: Yes.

Thom: It's like we've been in that space now for 11 years and I really love that space. What I love about that space is that it is design-driven and we are in it because we believe in our designs, we believe in the process of developing them. I'm in High Point, I am there, I'm like into it. I love talking to the other designers that come through my space and we talk about what's going on and what they like, what they don't like, what they need, what they don't need.

It's like I am a passionate designer. I'm a real design person. I'd like to think of myself as the real passionate designer who's not really irritating and when people say, "I'm afraid to invite you to my house," the first thing I say to them is, "Let me just tell you right now, I literally will – I am not that person. I am not that douchy, difficult, mean girl or boy."

Tobi: I agree with you, you're not.

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Thom: I am a lot like, for me, it is like I just am not that person and I enjoy the process. I really love design and it's – I'm thinking about it even when I'm not being – I'm not at work whether – at any level. So, to me, I think that a lot of what we're talking about is just being real. It's like being real and I do think that being authentic, being yourself, being real, being grounded, knowing who you really are and trying – one of the things that helped me actually, I think, not go in that weird direction that people can go in when they're recognizable at that level because of television or something like that, I mean, look I don't know, I can't even imagine what it would be like to be someone like a movie star. I just think it would be – it's very scary and unappealing to me just because of what I know as being a person that has been on cable it would just be a nightmare.

But I will tell you that I just don't watch myself. I don't. People say to me, "Have you seen – did you love making that show with Carson?" I say, "We had so much fun." They're like, "Oh you know my favorite part was – " I'm like, "Oh they kept that in?" And they say, "What do you mean they kept that in?" I'm like, "Well, I've never seen it." And they go, "What?" I said, "Yeah, I never really watch my shows." I maybe watch a little bit here and there just so I have a perspective on it, but I don't really watch it because it really breeds insecurity. It really does.

When I'm in front of the camera or any camera or an iPhone or an iPad or whatever I want to just be able to say, "Hey, guys, it's me. This is who I am. This is what I do. This is what I'm thinking. And this has been my experience and I'm enjoying the process in my life and design and all of these other things, so hopefully you are as well." That's kind of my message. I don't want it to be confused with me going, "What does my hair look like? Oh my God, do I look stupid? Did I say that? Did I not say that?"

You have to be thoughtful when you're speaking, that's an important of being an adult. Some days I'm more adult-like than others, but yeah, I just think that trying not to obsess about – I think when people look at themselves too long in the mirror they have the same problem. It's just like

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– they're like, "Well, I want to change this and I want to tuck that and I want to do this and I want to do that." I'm like, you know what, I dim the lights, I run by the mirror and I'm like as long as I don't start to cry or get scared I think I look fine.

Tobi: Yeah, no, I think that's great advice. I can relate just a tiny bit even with my podcast because I'm the same way. I've probably out of 150 podcast episodes listened to 5 of them because they were so good that I was interviewing somebody and I was like, "I want to go back and here what that person said in that part." It had nothing to do with me.

But I never re-listen and people find that fascinating, too. It's for the same reasons. Because when people start podcasts and you'll, of course, be the same way I'm sure with your podcast, you're right it breeds insecurity because you're like, "Oh, I sounded so dumb," or, "Why did I say that?" Or, "I should have cut that out," or, "Can we edit that?" I mean, my editor doesn't even edit my podcast hardly unless we literally have like a coughing fit or something crazy. We just wing it.

Thom: You just all of a sudden start potty mouthing it and then you're cussing every two seconds. It's like, bleep, bleep, bleep, bleep, bleep.

Tobi: Exactly, but otherwise we run the show and I, like you, I experience it in real time so I don't need to go back and listen to it 700 other times. So, I think you're right, that's really good advice.

Thom: Let me say this, I think people that are really interested in being recognizable or –

Tobi: Famous.

Thom: Any kind of fame at any level whatever, that's a scary word, I try never to use it. But I think people that are interested in that solely and they're not a dancer or a singer or an actor or a designer or a hairdresser or a chef or a something, if you don't have any of those skills to go along

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with it it's probably a very different journey. But when you have a passion and your passion is something that you love and that you live and that you breathe then I think you have to let the sort of well-known aspect of what you do be natural.

Tobi: Yeah, I like it.

Thom: I think that's a gift. I think it's a gift. You're a very lucky person in this world if you have the ability to have a career that is based on something that you absolutely are passionate about and that you think about and that you love. Whether it's being a mom or a dad or a doctor or a nurse or a truck driver or a chef, it doesn't matter. If you love what you're doing and you're really, really, really good at it, it doesn't seem like work and you're really lucky, and if you become a person that is really well-known in your industry for what you do please my one word of advice is always remember that what you do is bigger than your celebrity. What you do will be the thing that you will do forever and that celebrity or that recognizable aspect of it – you will start to understand it has A) a shelf life, and B) you have to nurture and keep that alive in a way that is somewhat a little bit not natural. You know what I mean?

Tobi: Yeah, because I think –

Thom: But the thing that you love and do and that you think and the reason that you are recognizable and people do want to hear what you're thinking or saying is the thing that you need to nurture not the other.

Tobi: I love that. Good advice.

Thom: I think that that's – if people know you as a great parent and they want parental advice from you you really just have to make sure that you are a great parent first and foremost and then dispense the advice. But if you become this sort of talking head that is dispensing advice based on just because you like hearing yourself say stuff and your kids are out there knocking over liquor stores then I don't think it's really –

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Tobi: It's probably not going to work.

Thom: By the way, I wouldn't mind getting – those kids sound like they'd be hilarious to hang out with.

Tobi: Yeah.

Thom: Great to invite to a party.

Tobi: Perfect. Okay, let's talk – wait, this is so fun. So, you've touched on a lot of things including, I think what – some things you just said are interesting and I don't want to go down that rabbit hole totally, I want to move over to this other conversation about how the business has evolved and where it's going, but even in part of what you were just saying people need to understand you don't just get famous and then everything keeps happening. You are consistently, as we've already heard, working. If you want to keep being on TV you got to keep pitching and having ideas and meeting with people and developing that.

If you want to keep having product lines – I know this from my experience, like you said a lot of people get them and then let them fall off and I can even see why. Some of my licensing partners I love and want to work with forever, some I'm okay if they kind of go away. It depends on what you're doing, but it is an investment of time and relationship and all of that.

So, you're working hard at all of those things. Let's talk a little bit about how the business has really evolved because I think it's evolved a lot even just in recent years and even with COVID and where we're going I'd love to hear your perspective. One of the things I love that you did, the minute COVID hit is you had this media hat on and you jumped right on Instagram and literally had a show every single week on Instagram. I love that you see opportunity and you leap.

Thom: Well, I will tell you, honestly, that was – Laura, who works with me, Laura LaFranais, who works me and we were probably on the three times a

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day, every day, four times a day, every day. Wherever I am, wherever she is we're constantly communicating and she and I were – it was the beginning of COVID and I was at my – I had COVID in the city. I was in my home in the city and then I finally felt well enough to come up to my house, got my two dogs, put them in the car, drove up here, was at my house recovering and we were like, “Wow, this is a really weird moment. I feel like everybody is going to – I feel like I'm worried that everyone is going to sort of retreat into their space and get very concerned and distant.”

I think that we have more – we kind of both thought – Laura was like, “Would you ever consider doing a show every day at 1 o'clock where we connect the design community and keep the conversation going, talk about what's happening, and also just kind of talk about design, talk about what's happening, but also talk about how we're feeling in the space and what's happening?” I said, “You know what, I think that would be great not only for myself, for the other person I'm talking to, but for anybody that would be willing to listen to us.” I thought, “Who the hell would be willing to listen to us? But let's do it.”

I immediately said, “I love it. Yes, let's do it.” I literally knew – if you said to me, “Thom, I will give you \$1 million to get on Instagram,” you would've literally walked away with \$1 million which I don't know where it would've come from. But if we could've scrounged it up you would've walked away with it.

But the thing is is that I really just didn't know that space and I said, “You know what? This is an opportunity for me to learn a new space and also be a part of keeping the design community together and also having a reason to take a shower and shave.” So, that's how we decided to do that, but yes, I agree with you. I do think that – and Laura will always say whenever an idea is presented to us I'm usually like – it really has to be a train wreck of an idea for me to say no to it. That could be one of the reasons I'm single. We'll leave that for a separate topic.

Tobi: And tired.

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Thom: Yeah, but the thing is that I really am like I love the idea of the business of design, the creative commerce, the business that I work in, the design world evolving and moving forward in a positive and professional and smart and interesting way. I love to be a part of the modernization, the update, the professionalism, the – I don't know, just like design as a concept moving in a positive direction and a really smart direction.

So, yeah, I really promote the idea of the world of design and designers really relying more on ourselves as a design community. It's like, why are we getting design business advice from people who are not even designers? I'm not even sure I have a very successful business in their space. You know what I mean? Why are we not relying on the design world to actually share information so that we can all have a stronger and more powerful not only professional connection, but just a more professional industry as a whole.

Why are we relying on people outside of the design world to recognize us as who's good and who's bad and who's this or who's that? It doesn't make sense to me. So, I saw this moment where I see design going in a really interesting direction because – and I talk to this a lot about young – when I talk to young people. I just did a thing yesterday with designers from – young designers, budding designers, designers in design school at Syracuse University where I studied and I was so excited to talk to them, but I was saying to them there are so many different things you can do in the design world right now.

It's not just being an interior designer anymore. You can be a lawyer in the design world, you can be a PR person, you can be a person that helps people develop podcasts in the creative world. I mean, there are so many different ways that you can be involved in the world of design as a creative individual that it is mind-boggling and amazing. From product design to wall coverings to interior design, it's all there and it's never been like it's been like this before.

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You can do it at the retail level. You can do it at the high-end retail level. You can do it through the trade level. You can do it at the bespoke level where you're being hired by clients and doing just – working for them exclusively. There's so many different layers to it and I just think, "Wow, what an amazing time to be a part of this industry." You know?

Tobi: Yes.

Thom: So, I think that you really can make your career in the world of design in the business of design, in the world of creative commerce, anything you'd really wanted to be. Who better to learn from than the people who have tried to keep it moving forward in that direction?

If I hear one more person say, "I just wish design was the way it used to be when clients used to fly us around in their – " I'm literally am like, "Oh my God, are you serious?" I can't even believe that's a conversation that's being had let alone I'm participating in it. But then you have people saying, "Well, I can't wait for everything to go back to normal."

Tobi: Right.

Thom: I'm like, "Okay, but can you describe what you see normal being?" Nothing can go backwards if we're moving forward. It can elements of what it was. I mean, I'd love to see us not worried about everyone's health and what we're dealing with right now is just sad and unfortunate and bizarre, but I don't think that what we've experienced is going to allow us to go back to what was. We can go back to something that's similar at some level, but with a much stronger understanding of how to move forward in a way where we hopefully will never find ourselves in this situation again and through the power of many different things, but certainly one of those things is design.

I mean, what does a concert look like in the future? What does a sporting event look like in the future? Design will have a hand in making that a better experience, a safer experience, a friendly, non-terrifying experience.

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Also, how we use our homes, how we think of our homes, how we think of restaurants, how we think of hotels, what we expect from a hotel and a restaurant moving forward. What we expect from a salad bar in the future.

Tobi: Truly, yeah. I'm with you. It's so interesting. I love what –

Thom: It's all about design. It's all about that. It is. I see –

Tobi: Yeah, and I think you and I are alike that we both love the progressive kind of thinking. I'm like you. Yeah, okay, some things can go back, but been there done that. Why aren't we designing the future of what this looks like? So, I absolutely agree with everything that you said, it's so cool to think about all of that.

How do we design - the future of design is the fun part. That is such a project in and of itself and I love – I just actually got the WELL AP certification which is from the people who did the LEED certification and it's about wellness in the built environment and you're right. It's going to have such an impact even more than ever because of COVID and that sort of thing, but there's so many fun and exciting things just like you're saying that we can do.

Thom: And also technology, okay?

Tobi: Yes.

Thom: Look at what we're doing right now and think of how many more people are doing what we're doing now today six months into this craziness than were doing it before. So, now you have to imagine we all the pros and the cons of it now, we all know what works, what doesn't work, what could be better. Now, those things are going to start to evolve.

Tobi: Totally.

Thom: In addition to that we also feel comfortable communicating and working this way whether it's working with an architect or a contractor or a

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client or having – catching up with a friend or a family member or doing a podcast or whatever. So, I just feel like there's an excitement right now about hey, I'm not discrediting all the craziness and I'm very aware that we have to – that is a real situation, but I think there are things coming out of this moment that are going to propel technology, health and wellness, a lot of things that I think design can have a really strong hand and impact on in a very positive way if we are thoughtful, progressive, creative, and also kind of super aware of how lucky we are to have made it through this and what did we learn from it?

Tobi: I think one of the things I'm hearing, too, with what you're saying is if we're not careful get into that narrative of design is dying and the people are all going to do it themselves. You could look at it that way and that's why some of the people want to go back to the way it used to be, but what you're saying it you don't have to think of it that way at all. It's actually being reinvented. We're reinventing design.

We actually have an opportunity to make it something more vibrant than it's ever been. Not that it has to be dying, right?

Thom: But I will tell you, you know what, there are realtors out there, real estate – I would say they're agents now, that's an outdated term, but the thing is that there are people out there that will say that real estate will never be what it was or that dentistry will never be – I'm like okay but – then there are people out there who are reshaping what we expect from a real estate professional or an agent or an agency that represents properties that are for sale.

The thing is is that I mean, you can either one of those people that questions whether something is good for our health or not, or you can say, "Hey, I'm going to do everything that I think is going to be positive and I'm going to be a part of the solution." I think that it doesn't matter whether you're a designer or you're a real estate professional or you are a doctor or you are a – whatever, a chef, you know what I mean?

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It's like people would say, "Oh well, the Internet is going to kill fashion." I'm like, "Is it? I don't think so."

Tobi: Right.

Thom: I'm still wearing clothes. You know what I mean? But we have to really figure out how is that business model moving forward?

Tobi: Yes, yes.

Thom: Instead of being like, "Oh, I just wish that it was – I still wish that it was the way it was," you have to be like, "Hey, how do we take the best of what is was and apply it to what is and actually be able to forecast what will be and move in a direction and take a risk, put some skin in the game, and move forward?"

Tobi: Yeah, I love it. Otherwise, we'd still be in horse and buggies, right?

Thom: I mean, really.

Tobi: That's that mentality.

Thom: Yeah, I tell people all the time, I go, "Let me tell you right now, everything I know in the world right now if I was never on an airplane and I never saw an airplane and you told me you were going to put me in an aluminum tube, fill it with gasoline, and throw it into the air at 500 miles an hour, I would say, 'You're crazy and that's never going to work.'"

Tobi: Exactly.

Thom: I understand how some people may have an aversion to sort of moving forward.

Tobi: To change, yeah.

Thom: But in your space, in your space, the space you know and the space you are passionate about you should be a leader in your space.

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Tobi: Yes.

Thom: Now, I know really nothing about the airplane industry other than what I know as a person who utilizes it quite often, but I think that if you're really, really passionate about your space you should be one of the people that helps move it forward not holding it stagnant or wishing that it was the way it was. That is like – I don't know. That feels not like – it doesn't feel interesting.

Tobi: I agree. It doesn't feel interesting. I love the question like, what does this make possible? Good or bad, hard or easy, whatever we've been through, where we stand right now what does this now make possible that wasn't possible whether if it's even just that it shifted so many people's mindsets, right?

Thom: Agree.

Tobi: So, as we wrap up if they're thinking about this direction, because we've covered so much interesting stuff and really have – no, I love it. It's so good. I mean, like I told you before we even started, I'm like, "Just reading your resume I was like I thought I do a lot, but you do a lot of stuff." But as you're thinking about this and you're getting excited because that's what you do and passionate about moving forward, if there was just one or two things that are the most exciting to you right now, even in this realm of what we've been talking about, what is really lighting you on fire that you think is super important that you want to give your attention?

Thom: Well, I would say two things. One is I actually right now like the intimacy that we're all experiencing in terms of whether it's a relationship with our friends, our family, our homes, I think people have had an opportunity to kind of slow down for a minute. I think that that has been something that I think is going to affect all of the various parts of our lives from design to the way we entertain ourselves, the way that we live in our homes, the way that we – just a variety of things.

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I'm very interested in how that is going to be something that kind of really has a major hand in how we move forward. I think that's really interesting to me. I also really love the product world that I'm working in and I can't tell you how important that all of the projects that I work on for all of my clients are a lot of times where a lot of those ideas come from.

So, I really hold our private clients in our sort of brick and mortar as I call it interior design clients, whether they're commercial or residential, those are super important. But I also love this space of then taking those really bespoke and then bringing them to our product world and then bringing them to other designers and bringing them to High Point. I'm enjoying that dynamic in that relationship and I think that that's been a really cool thing for what we're doing.

Tobi: Yeah, so like solving a problem and knowing that other people need it solved, too, so you make it accessible to a lot more people based on the laboratory you've worked in yourself in a way.

Thom: Right, exactly. So, I think – I kind of love that. I love that sort of moment right now, but I really do think that one other thing that's been really inspiring to me has been seeing how so many different people are acclimating to this new reality of what we're dealing with and it's – I think that all the creativity and all of these solutions and seeing people being a part of the solution is inspiring me to be that way in the various things that we're working on and to be about moving forward.

It was one of the things that I felt very strongly about in terms of being at High Point and being a part of the solution and being a part of moving it forward. It was so much more impactful than we could have ever expected in terms of the amount of people that were there, what they were looking for, how excited they were and how excited we were. I just think enthusiasm breeds enthusiasm and positive thinking breeds positive thinking and solutions breed more solutions. It's about working together, working as team both creatively and just sort of fundamentally. So, that's what's been really been kind of exciting for me across the board.

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Tobi: I love it. I love it. Well, thank you so much for letting us into your world and kind of hear how it all work and I appreciate you. It's been fun. Everybody can't see. You have your dogs in the background that are adorable, your team in the background. If anybody wants to know how it really works at Thom's business there's like five people in the background, they're all waving. They're like, "Hey, can I talk to you?" The dogs are there. It's adorable, the dogs.

Thom: By the way, I'm not at office.

Tobi: I know, it's your house, but I mean in your world. That's in your world, right?

Thom: I know the dogs are – right now I have two dogs looking at me going, "Okay, it's time to eat."

Tobi: Yeah, I saw they were on the sofa, so cute.

Thom: There's all sorts of commotion in the background and everything. Look, this is a real world operation and I'm a real person in the real world doing real things, so I always say sometimes here you can hear people on the outside of the house putting – dealing with some things that got – last year during the winter were getting a little bit rotten, so everyone is like, "What's that?" I'm like, "I think it's a drill."

Tobi: Hey, I'm used to it and depending on where people are. Sometimes we're talking to people in the city and there's like a crane outside and there's a fire truck and there's – it's so just part of life now which is fun. But I can see your face going, "Oh my gosh, what's happening behind me?" I'm like, "They're all good. They're fine." So fun, but thank you really for letting us hear what is was like.

I just appreciate you. I mean, I know that we talked about it already, but I do appreciate how genuine you are and I do think you are very real and love that you work hard to stay in that keep your head on your shoulders

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place because it really shines and I think it shows in your work and in all the things you do. So, I love that about you.

Thom: Well, thank you. Honestly, that's the best compliment. Thank you, I love that and I always say whenever I'm asked what is my least favorite thing? I always say pretentious behavior.

I will say that someone once asked me why I chose my watch that I was wearing at that time and they said, "I love the blue face with the red hand," and I said, "Well, because it matches my boat." I have to tell you as it was coming out of my mouth I was like, "Oh my God, don't say that." Every once in a while, I F up myself, but I really meant it. It was a person who I thought was like – it was like someone who I thought would appreciate the honest answer, but I also – it's like, it made me throw up in my mouth and I was the one who said it.

Anyways, but yeah I really don't love pretentious behavior and I love when people are really kind of down to Earth and can be themselves and are comfortable in their skin and are interested in other people, all different people who are comfortable in their skin and who are fun to be around. So, to me, that's just like – that's a fundamental sort of building block about just spending time with interesting that like to have fun.

Tobi: Well, I love it and you're fun and we've had a great time. Thank you for being here. I know my audience will love it and best of luck on all the stuff you're working on, the podcast, the TV show, all the things. We'll be watching. We'll be following. Where should they follow you the most? On Instagram?

Thom: Instagram @ThomFilicia or @SedgwickBrattle and also you can check out what we're doing thomfilicia.com or sedgwickandbrattle.com, but yeah I think Instagram is always a fun place to check us out so it's @ThomFilicia or @SedgwickBrattle.

Tobi: Okay, we'll be following.

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Thom: We're always doing fun stuff and I can't wait to have you return the favor and have you. We're going to do a reciprocation date.

Tobi: Perfect.

Thom: It'll be great. Good to see you. You look fabulous. Great to see you, big kiss.

Tobi: Thank you.

Thom: Thanks to everybody for listening and I hope to see you all soon. Big kiss, stay well.

Tobi: Okay, you too. Bye, friend.

Thom: Bye.

Tobi: Okay, so like good stuff, right? Thom is so fun. You have to follow him if you're not already which I know you are, but I'm just saying it anyway. If you're not following him on Instagram, head over. I had the joy of being on Instagram show, *House Calls* a while back. You can see all of those episodes on his IGTV. He's just a fun guy and he's a great, talented creative, and he is just a person to keep watching because you never know what new, progressive idea is coming from Thom and his team. So, thanks for listening. I hope you loved this episode as much as I enjoyed interviewing Thom and being with him today and I'll see you back here next week with another great episode of *The Design You Podcast*. Bye for now.

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