

Ep #173: The Importance of Having a Niche: An Interview with Design You Members



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 173.

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.

Hello my friends. How are you? I love today's podcast episode. It was so fun. So, a few months ago, a couple of months ago maybe I did sort of a roundtable discussion with some of our Millionaire Mentorship members. And I loved it so much. I knew I had to do this with some of our current and former Design You members. In fact, I think they're all current members except for one who was with us for a while and did amazing things and then is out in the world creating other stuff now which is so fun. And you'll learn all about these ladies in just a minute.

So, I gathered up some of the people. And I was like what should our topic be? What do I want to talk about? What do I want to show the world that is happening in our program? How do I want to celebrate some of the rockstars? And I decided it would be really fun to gather up some of the people who have created digital products, really courses, digital courses and some other things, some other digital things, but digital scalable products in our program.

I think most, if not, all of them either hadn't really ever thought about a course before or at least hadn't started on a course before coming into our program and learning our digital marketing course and our concepts. And getting coached on it, and working through all their fears, and all the things that go into creating products like this. And it is not easy. It is not easy at all. Not only is it not easy because of the actual manual, physical labor of writing, and depending on how you deliver it, either videos or PowerPoints or all of that stuff.

But the really, really hard part is the mindset work around it, the fears, the imposter syndrome, the who's going to buy it, why would anybody want this

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from me? Who's going to pay for this information? And all the stuff that goes with it. And these powerhouse women, they're on this episode today really did that work with us in Design You and overcame those fears. And created incredible things and you're going to hear about it. I'm just so proud. I'm like a proud mom, or big sis or I don't know, aunt or something to these incredible, incredible women.

And then one of the things that I really want to point out, and I think I do talk about it in the episode a little bit. But it's just so remarkable how different their programs are and how they really bought into the concepts we teach in Design You around picking a niche and really getting specific and dialing in who your customer really is and what you're going to teach them. And not just leaning on the more kind of easier path which is more generalist. Because when you're willing, and again this is where so much of the mindset comes in.

When you're willing to constrain, and you're willing to get specific, and you're brave enough to do what might even feel like pigeonholing yourself in the moment that you're creating something specific, but you're then willing to put it out in the world and see what happens, the results are just incredible.

So, without further ado because I know you're going to want to learn from these amazing women. We have people doing everything from how to run a construction job, to consumers and designers, how to move from the city to the suburbs, how to decorate sorority houses professionally. And then someone whose even mentoring future interior designers among all kinds of other things that she's doing. There's such a variety, it's so much fun.

So here we go, this is my episode with Jill Kalman, Liz Toombs, Rebecca Ward and Renee Biery, rockstars of Design You who have really done incredible things, so enjoy.

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Tobi: Hi ladies, welcome to the Design You podcast. I am super excited. This is going to be really fun. There's big smiles on all your faces. We will be laughing a lot. But let's get into this cool conversation about all the amazingness that you all have been creating. So, I have four of you on. So, let's start with Jill. Jill, tell us who you are, what you do, what you've created. Give us the stuff and then we're going to lead in – we're going to let everybody introduce themselves and we're going to have a really cool conversation.

Jill: Sure. Jill Kalman. I'm an interior designer from Connecticut. And I've really pivoted my business. And I was pivoting it before COVID, it just happens that my niche is, or our clients that are moving from a major city to a suburb. And people were like, "Well, I guess you were clairvoyant." But that really is who I had been serving for a dozen years before COVID because I live in a suburb outside of Manhattan.

Having said that, I really felt like, well, the challenges moving from New York City to a Connecticut suburb are the same challenge as moving from any major city to any suburb. And I really wanted to start to be able to reach and help more people. And I wanted to sort of take that traditional design service that everyone is used to where the designer comes in and we're handholding and we're every meeting in person. And we're ordering and babysitting every little product and flip it right on its head.

Because I had really noticed for a few years or so prior to that that wasn't really working for clients. And I don't think it was working well for designers. I don't think it's a great business model that's that profitable.

Tobi: In what way, what do you mean, just too many details, too much confusion?

Jill: So, I think from the client end with the birth of the internet, whether the design industry wants to face it or not, it was affected and is affected, and is growing every single day. So, you're getting shopped on the internet. And let's face it, the internet pricing I have found is either matching or

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below designer pricing. And I didn't want to get into those sort of fights with clients or sort of conversations where it almost makes the designer not seem credible. Because they don't really understand our supply chain.

They don't really understand that my price isn't rock bottom wholesale. My price is even different than a retailer. So, I kind of [crosstalk] on the client end. And I think on the designer end, yes, I mean I had a person in my office working three full days a week just monitoring orders. That's a lot of overhead. So even for the markup I was putting on it, I wasn't in the end making that much money on the orders when you really look at it. And so, it was like, well, why shouldn't I just be paid for my time and expertise and help them shop easily?

And once I did that I started this digital service and I really fine-tuned it as I went along. We sold a couple, started at a lower price. Again, I really listened to customers and I fine-tuned it, fine-tuned it to a point where we're selling multiple per month. I'm away on vacation right now. I've sold four of them while I'm away.

Tobi: And this is more of like a package deal, because you also have a course that you can talk about too, a mini course or a course. But this first digital product you created is more in a sense kind of like design in a box. We have a package and we do this stuff for you and you know exactly what you're getting. And we do the design and you do the shopping and it's all for a set price.

Jill: Yeah. But it's very curated because I have known all the vendors for over these seven years, I know where to get, all the stuff that we get, you guys know all the various vendors we've worked with. It is all available on the internet. I hate to tell everybody but it is. I know where to get it. I have some custom upholstery shops and things nearby that I refer people to for custom. And there are some other upholstery manufacturers.

Tobi: Window treatments, that kind of stuff?

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Jill: Yeah. Maybe they need a custom sofa because we can't get the right size, whatever. But I started with this digital because I wanted to take that sort of core thing we were doing every day. And say, "You know what? This isn't working on either end. How do we make it work for us as a company? How do we make it work for the consumer?"

Tobi: I love it. And what's it called, what is the service called?

Jill: Basically, it's a digital – well, it's called Room Service. And it's called Reduce the Overwhelm, Overcome your Move One Room at a Time. And you can buy one room from me or I have a client that bought nine rooms from me at a time.

Tobi: So good, yeah.

Jill: It averages two to three. But the thing about it is you could buy one room or two and then you can come back to me and buy five more. There's no – it's meant to be easy for the consumer. It's meant for them to feel comfortable. So, it was like okay.

Tobi: And what I love...

Jill: Yeah. It was just how do we take the core thing we do, flip it on its head and of course, yes, having a course was always in the back of my head. But I wanted to dovetail this service first, derive income from that, work on that while I was developing my course.

Tobi: Yeah. And it makes so much sense, like we talk about in Design You, that if you do the service first it kind of creates your course because you know what it is people are asking for. Even the people who don't want to buy that service, you kind of know what they still need, or what's hard for them to do on their own or all of those things. I love that so much. It's really, really good. And I love that it's so cut and dried and people know what they're getting.

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Because I think one of the challenges with custom full service interior design projects is we tend to say we can do anything and everything. And we think that's a good thing. We're like, "We're giving them all the options." And we're really just confusing people. And then we have this never ending project and we get tired of it, and they get tired of it. And there's spending fatigue and all there's all this stuff.

And so, I absolutely love this because they know when they're going to start. They know what they're going to get. They know when it's going to end. And then if they want to do it again they absolutely can, it's so smart.

Jill: It's so critical, Tobi, because like you said, the projects were never ending. And that wasn't good for the client or for us, as you said. It burns everybody out. And then it leaves you with a bad feeling at the end and that translates a lot of times to an unsuccessful project. I hated that because I'm so passionate about what I do. I like what I do. And I want people to feel like when I come in to help them I truly am helping them.

Tobi: Yeah, so much there. We'll circle back because I want to talk about your niche more too and some of the other things you've mentioned. But let's move on, who's ready to tell us about their business now? Okay, let's go to Rebecca and then Renee. Okay, Rebecca, tell us.

Rebecca: Okay. I'm Rebecca Ward, I'm an interior designer in California. We do full service design. And a lot of what Jill was saying is that again, everything's available to the public. We have started tailoring down our clients that we take on to be those that just want us to do everything for them. They don't care that they can get it online, they still want me to source it and do all of the work. So, we've started weeding out a lot of people from the ones that we're accepting. I felt I still wanted to service the people I was turning away.

So, I came up with a course that could help them and it's called Home Design Coach Course. And it's a six week program where it kind of takes them through our process that we do internally in our design studio of

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selecting furnishings and sourcing them, coming up with color schemes and layouts and all that. And shows them basically how, if they are a DIYer and they want to do it on their own, that they could actually get a final result of a furnished room put all together like a designer has done it.

And I'm coaching them along the way through videos. And then they have the option to upgrade to one-on-one with me if they want to do that. So, we've had a lot of people going through that. We've been able to kind of funnel some people into that and not just say, "No, I can't help you. Here's another option for you that could work." So that's been great coming up with that last year during COVID and after taking the Digital Marketing for Creatives, is I could do a course. I never thought I could do a course.

I knew I was an expert at design but how to bring that to someone in the public. So, creating the course was just I'm going to do this. We did it. I worked with my team and we got it out there and learned a few things along the way. And as I'm getting ready for my next course that I'm making, switching some things up, really fine-tuning it. But now it's like I'm on this path of I can make courses and help people beyond just the service there, yeah, that I work with.

Tobi: I love that. So, what do you think changed, in the process of taking our Digital Marketing for Creatives Course and you're like, "I can't be a course creator." And now all of a sudden you are, what shifted for you to make you start believing that you could do this?

Rebecca: Well, part of it I think was imposter syndrome we always deal with. I'm not the expert. But one of the things that you had said in that course was that we can be knowledge brokers. And that term really helped me to understand that I don't have to be the know it all of this subject. I just need to help people understand the knowledge and bring it to them. And so that kind of took the intimidation away from creating the course. And I'm just helping people get the knowledge that they need.

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Tobi: Because when we let people in on the system we've created and not feel like it's us that we're selling, it's a whole different feeling. It's a whole different level of confidence because you're like, "Well, I might not feel like a total expert. I may not ever feel that way even though I probably am. But I know this system works. I know the steps to take. I know where to find the things." That's so good.

And I love that you said, so you said the term DIY. And I think that it's worth kind of mentioning here that DIY I think has a whole different meaning than it used to have. Because I think our connotation of DIY as designers is really negative and people who don't want to spend a dime. And I think to Jill's point earlier, don't you all think that DIY has shifted more to people who want to be involved in their project? Maybe think they could almost do it themselves, spend a lot of time on the internet and researching, love home goods, love interiors, kind of wish they were a designer.

And we used to think that was a nightmare client. And it can be sometimes when you're doing one-on-one when they start keeping you from doing your job. But in this scenario it's actually an ideal situation. And there's thousands, there's millions of those people that want to be involved. And so, would you agree that when you say DIY, you really don't mean the 'DIY' like we think, but you mean a person who wants to do it themselves or be involved, or at least is willing to do a lot of it themselves and you guide them?

Rebecca: Yeah. That's definitely, it's not just the home weekend warrior project person. It's like they actually want – they've always had an interest in design maybe, they think that they can maybe take a stab at it and learn how to do it. But they themselves feel like they don't have the knowledge to do it and/or how to even start to go about it and so that's to get them to that point. And be like, "Yeah, you can love design. You can watch all the shows and have all the Pinterest boards and try to do it yourself but I'll show you how to curate it and bring it together so that it looks right."

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Tobi: Yeah. And of course, there is that expertise because there is a difference because they're like, "I tried and it didn't look quite right." And that's that missing piece that designers can give when we do digital courses or products. And I think sometimes we're just giving them the validation. For some people they're really dang close to what we might select, or at least we would approve what they selected and they just needed us to validate them. And so, taking that course or hearing that training is giving them that validation. So cool.

Okay, well, we'll circle back because you're doing more things too. I've seen all – I love to watch you all because even if you're – a lot of you are still in Design You, some of you have moved on from Design You but you've had big results. And I love, like once you're in the family you're always in the family. So, I love following what you're doing, watching what you're creating, it's so fun. So, we'll circle back in a minute. Okay, Renee, tell us about you and what you've created. It's been so fun to watch and you're about to go through a launch right now actually.

Renee: I am. I'm Renee Biery. I'm an interior designer in Wilmington, Delaware. And pre COVID I have done your traditional studio interior design, residential mostly. I've been doing this for – I've just got into our 28th year in the business. And I met you years ago at Highpoint and then started following along and listening to podcasts. And when COVID hit you started all these webinars. And I thought I'd finally have time to, we were in lockdown and I was watching. And you get to a point in your career, I feel have done it. I feel I have seen it.

And I've been very fortunate. I have had great experiences and great amazing projects. And you get to that point where you know, I personally, aside from some partial assistance, I work alone. So, there is only so many projects I can take on at a time. And what I really love and specialize in is helping clients through construction projects. I was trained that in design school in New York. And I just happened to work with women and then started seeking out women who did that kind of work.

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And so, when I met you and you were discussing how to find your niche, I would nod and smile along. And then all of a sudden you're like, "No, no, no, not what are you good at, but what makes you angry?" And it was just a light bulb moment because what makes me angry are the stories I hear about all the construction projects that go wrong. And mainly from women, and this is in my personal life, it's not obviously my clients because I'm there helping them. And it's what I do best. It's what I know inside and out. And it's mostly avoidable.

And that literally set me on a path I did not anticipate. I certainly didn't think it was even possible. I looked back at my notes from the early days in your course and I clearly didn't know what you were talking about because of the arrows that would say, "Look this up. What is an OBM? Look up this, you know, these three letters." And so, the course started creating itself. I just kept thinking, no, it's too soon, there is no way I can nail this niche in, I think it was week two. But I just never stopped thinking about it.

I'd be in the shower thinking about how I could educate people on this aspect of construction. And then I'd be driving and I'd be thinking of another one. And so, the course just sort of came. And it was grueling. I'm not going to fool anyone. It was a grueling process. You can ask my family. They didn't see me for a while in the evenings because I would work all day and then I'd grab my laptop and bang out as many lessons. But at the end of the day, I'm just incredibly proud of what came out of it. I trust the knowledge that is in there.

And like you said, we tend to have a hard time seeing ourselves or presenting ourselves of, "Hi, I'm Renee, I'm an expert." It just doesn't come off the tip of most designers' tongues even though it should. And it certainly does not come off the tip of my tongue. But I know that my course is expertly curated and the knowledge in there can help countless people. And so, I love that about it. I'm still learning the marketing and all of those machines that go on behind the scenes. But what's in it, I mean it ended up being almost five and a half hours if you take it start to finish.

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And it could go longer, at some point my OBM said, “You’re done. Look, you’ve got to stop. We have to wrap this up.” And I said, “Well, we could go in this direction.” She’s like, “You’re done.” And that’s a good thing to have because you do, you sort of get into your rabbit holes and you just keep, you know, I see in your emails, “You’re just creating. You need to stop creating and then start sharing.” So, we had a little bit of – we launched in February.

In the meantime, sorry, in the meantime we did create some freebies on construction management, a workbook which is a really robust checklist of really how you get started and what areas you need to focus on. And a paint pro tip program that again covers everything that you really need to be aware of. And initially our goal was homeowners. And it was amazing.

Designers came flocking in and were beating down my email door saying, “I need more. How do you do this? How do I market myself? I’m starting to do it, I’m insecure, I don’t know where I should go for this, and that, and the other.” And so, we started paying attention more to designers. I admit, I did not see that one coming. And I think again because we’re so in our moment that I think, well, most designers do this because I’m doing it. And that obviously is not the case.

And so, we launched the consumer course back in February and the launch went really well. Everybody was super enthused and really soaking up the knowledge. And unfortunately, we had to cut the launch short. I had a personal loss directly during launch. But again everybody, they stayed and it’s been really amazing as I sort of rebuilt both, had to take some time off from both work. And we’re ready to launch again. So, we’re launching again on Monday, this coming Monday. And I’m really excited.

Some people who were in the original launch have just been in touch and they’re coming again to this launch. But in the meantime, we’d had some members join. And it has been amazing. So, the best part about this course is we created a private Facebook group. And it’s similar to inside Design

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You. You've got all of this back and forth between members and I had that experience. I saw this. And then I'm in there coaching them. We just went through an entire contractor view through photographs of someone's contract and back and forth with comments.

And the woman left and she said, "I feel so empowered to go back to my contractor now. I feel like you're coming to the meeting with me." And this woman lives in California. And I just, I closed my laptop, I said, "I'm done. That's exactly what I needed." That is really my goal because what I do is not necessarily complicated. It's just it's unfamiliar territory. And so, my goal is to train as many women as possible in the parameters, in the details of a construction project because stereotypically they're the ones running the project.

And I see them sort of shying away, not wanting to ask questions and just nodding and smiling, thinking that that's the right answer. And then they get in way over their heads, both financially, and project scope creep. And it's a disaster. And then of course they're upset and angry at the end. And it just, it really drives me crazy. And so, by giving all this information out these women can actually go in going, "Renee mentioned I'm allowed to say this." And they do actually say that. They go, "You gave me the confidence to actually ask that question."

And it's been great. So, it's been really reassuring that when you create something in a bubble which is what I did with the course, you never know what it's going to be like. It's like sending your kids out, you don't know how they're going to behave once they leave the door.

Tobi: Yeah, and will people like your children or think that they're total jerks?

Renee: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And a little bit of the DIY, the HGTV, I'm not as huge of a fan. I certainly don't recommend people watching them in my situation because they do strip down to the process to such a benign level that everyone thinks that's how their job will run. And you see a problem

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show up and in a two and a half minute commercial break, it's resolved. And people are watching going, "I can do this." And they don't show the 20 people behind the scenes actually doing the work.

Tobi: And thousands of dollars.

Renee: And the tens of thousands of words, yes. You will catch me yelling at the TV if HGTV is on. My kids actually like to watch it, because I'm like, "That's not possible. No, that's not." They tell me I'm ruining the show for them which is my goal.

Tobi: That's great. Awesome, so fun, thank you. And I'm going to circle back to you on a few things in a minute, everybody. We'll take this conversation deeper. I also want to talk about your podcast and Jill's podcast because there's so many things that you all have accomplished that you did not think was possible a year or two ago, which is so exciting. But before we do that I want Liz to share about her and her course that she's created. And then we'll get into sort of a roundtable discussion about a few other things.

So, Liz, welcome and tell us about who you are and what you have created.

Liz: Yes. Hi. So, I'm Liz Toombs. I own PDR Interiors. And we are based in Lexington, Kentucky. And we have a unique niche market in sorority houses. So, we work with sorority organizations, women's organizations across the country in different campuses. Most of our clients happen to be the housing departments in the headquarters. And it just sort of was something that I stumbled upon I guess we'll say.

When I got my first project it was a fraternity house, a men's organization at the University of Kentucky. I helped them. And then was referred to a women's organization on campus. And from there I don't know if any you all were Greek, but when you are in authority, the women tend to, the alumna are the ones that usually get out and they're in charge of the house

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after graduation. And so, it's called a housing board, a local house core board. Anyway, so I was referred over to that group who was working with their headquarters.

And then from there saw all the opportunity and was given the opportunity to go nationally and travel for houses on different campuses across the country and work with them. And everything I've ever done has been word of mouth. So, I grew the client base from there. And over the past few years it's just been gnawing at me about those local house core boards. There's so many of them out there, so many of them are just islands. They don't really know how to go about updating their house.

So, they may throw some money at a space, it's not quite right, everyone just lives with it for a little bit and has a little bit of heartburn over it or maybe they don't do anything because they're afraid of making the wrong move. There's a lot of things that go on. And so, I really wanted to offer something to these locally run boards who maybe have no interest in being run or overseen by the national level. But they do want professional help and they just don't know how to go about it.

Or they want a little bit of guidance because these women maybe have beautiful homes themselves. They understand the ins and outs of putting colors and patterns together but they don't quite understand how to transfer that to a collegiate experience because your home and my home are very different than a house where 50 women come in and live for a semester and gather. And you have hundreds of people coming through during a recruitment process.

So, my team put together a course that is targeted towards those house core boards. And it walks them through our process. We're a very process driven team. We over the years as we have done these houses, we created a system that we follow every time for the most part, things that we try to make sure we're accomplishing. And so, we have checklists for these

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women so that they make sure that they're hitting all of the benchmarks, and the needs, and the timelines.

Because a lot of times when the students get out of school for the summer, that's the only two or three months that they have to get work done at this house. You have to be ready to hit the ground running. And so that's what we've tried to put into this course. It's less about matching colors and pulling patterns, although we address that a little bit. It's more about the process and how to get this done correctly so that you're recruitment ready in the fall or whenever the students come back.

Tobi: Amazing. I love it so much. And what I was just thinking and I want to go here next and see what kind of insight you all have because this is so fun to see a couple of years, let's see, Design You is probably going on four years old. And like you all said, this is a grueling process. People don't just enter Design You two or three years ago and whip out a course. There's a whole learning curve, even just to teach our industry that this is a good thing to do.

And I love that you're all sitting here and you've been able to move past the scarcity of kind of being your own competition, kind of knocking yourself off. Because we were all afraid at one point of well, if I teach everybody how to do this I won't have any clients, which we now know is not at all the case. There's different categories of clients like Rebecca was talking about.

And then I love to see the different niches because I think that's another thing that people really don't get because they're like, "I'm just supposed to make some templated design boards and sell them. And it's going to be a generalist." And yes you can totally be more of a generalist if you want to. And Rebecca's course is a little more like that. But then we see Renee's is about construction and Liz is about very specific sorority houses and Jill is about moving to the suburbs. And they're so specific.

And I know this plays so much into a lot of your success, even Rebecca's, which is a little more general, is about a very specific process that she

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uses. She's an expert. So, let's talk about niche. What comes up when you all think about kind of where you used to be, where you are now. Renee you've spoken to it some and you can say more if you want. But who else can really start to speak to this? Liz, I would love to hear from you. And I want to hear from Jill.

Jill's was so fun because like she said earlier, she looks clairvoyant but I always just think well, had she been afraid to put it out there then no one would have thought she was clairvoyant because that whole opportunity would have just passed her by. So, Liz, let's start with you and then let's, yeah, chime in and talk about this concept of really focusing in your area of expertise.

Liz: Sure. So, when I started out, like most people I was focusing on residential. Did some commercial offices and so I say I fell into this Greek niche by accident. It was word of mouth, referral and so on and it's just kind of taken on a life of its own. But I realized, and we still do residential and we have a lot of really good long term customers. But this past year we've really worked just to change our messages on social media and to focus in on the sororities. And we still work with men's groups too but the sororities are our focus.

We want to work with these women organizations, so the ones want little pretty, those final pieces. Somebody mentioned earlier, I think it was Jill about these projects that go on and on and you never really get to finish them. And I have the benefit of really getting to finish these projects and seeing that before and that after and seeing people's faces come in. And so, I know that I really love getting to do that.

And I love that I don't really have to spread myself too thin anymore and try to be everything to everyone because the deeper we got into the sorority work the more I realized oh gosh, sometimes there's some residential projects that they just don't fit a real house anymore. And it's not that we

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don't like the client or the work it's just we're not best suited for that because we've been focusing over here for so long.

And so, I listened to so many of the coaching calls, Tobi, during COVID, when I was doing stuff in my house, the painting and listening to people starting their course. And I just thought, I mean I don't understand why, I just don't jump in and do this because there is the knowledge and to get it out there.

And so, I think what clicked for me was, there was a woman you had on a call one time and she was talking about library design and her doing a course. And that's when it all really came together for me of not only could I still serve my niche market but then I could do this course as well and start to help even more folks.

Tobi: Yeah. And be known for that thing. I love that so much. Thank you for sharing that. And I think what's so interesting is that most of the people that I see afraid to select a niche are the ones that are looking at niches like you all and going, "I wish I had one like that." And they have a million things they could have picked. And a lot of them have had seven ideas. And they're like, "Yeah, but I don't know and maybe. And I'm just not sure. And I don't want to be pigeonholed. And what if I don't like it?"

And all the normal stuff, you all had all that too. I had all that too. But you just decided to park those negative thoughts and go for it. And now, I mean and look what happens with it. It blows up your business in the best sort of way. And everybody could have that, they just have to decide to. But people are afraid to.

Renee: Sometimes you have to repark those fears, periodically.

Tobi: Well, yeah, they keep coming up. And we get bored, and we're creatives, and we're visionaries. And I've told you all so many times, I literally tried to get rid of all interior designers as my clients. I'm like, "I've met all of you. I've coached all of you. I've given you all of my things. I'm so

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over you. I don't even like you anymore." Yet I would not know a single one of you sitting here with all of this amazing success that you have created for yourself if I had listened to those things. And it comes up all the time.

So yeah, Jill, what about you, what about that process? It seemed so easy to watch you just decide but I know even like Renee said about making a course, but even just picking the niche, it can feel really grueling, it can feel scary.

Jill: It can and when I was in Design You that was one of the first things you needed to do. That was sort of your first step. And did I constantly question it? Yes. Did I look at other people and go, "I wish I had that, that's so much better?" Yes. But I also, and I think I told you this once, I had this thought of this is what it is and it really, you know, arrows seemed to be pointing to that the most. And I had learned in design school. When you were getting ready to do your final because a lot of times your final presentation could really be pretty creative and pretty open.

And I remember my design instructor who was also my mentor, he was like, "Now listen, once you decide buckle down and go with it." Because you have this limited amount of time to get it complete. "Just go with it, go all in on it and go with it because you could change your mind for months on this." And this was the same thing. I thought I could go back and forth on this for years. So, I'm going with this. And like anything else in life, so if it didn't work then it didn't work but we had to try it. It was the same thing with the course. It was the same thing with the service I developed.

You have to just start. And it sounds cliché and that's what everybody says, but literally I can't stress it enough, you have to, the one word is start, period, just start.

Tobi: And I think about that concept of leap and the net will appear because for you, you leapt and then COVID happened which like you had no way to know that was going to happen. But then all of a sudden you were on the Today Show written up. And you were on all these interviews

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and people were like, you know, all these amazing opportunities because they're like, "Who's the expert that knows how to talk about this mass exodus from the city to the suburb right now?" And you were there and you were ready because you had already made that leap.

And sometimes while we're waiting for the net to appear or for the opportunities to arise, it feels like we did the wrong thing or this is taking forever. And so, it's kind of like that saying of an overnight success takes 15 years. It's like you think it's forever and that it's wrong, and it's hard, and the course is hard. And then all of a sudden you hit a groove or a stride or you get a win and you're like, "Wait, this might actually work." And that's what all of you I've watched you do so well.

Renee: And Tobi, and I think one of the things also with Jill's point was you make that commitment to start. And then all of a sudden people react differently. And people want you to stay in the role that they see you in. Then when you start dialing down to maybe one of your entire package you start upsetting people. And I didn't necessarily upset people but it was fascinating to hear how many, even locally, I mean totally unrelated no clients. They'd be like, "I had no idea you did construction."

And I said, "I know, I mean shame on me, obviously I wasn't promoting that enough." But she's like, "I always thought all you did was decorating." So, it's hard. They had to sort of re-picture how my day worked and reevaluate. Online and social media we lost followers and it was a little upsetting at first. You were thinking oh my gosh. And then you think, okay, they weren't here for my niche. I need to focus on the people who want the information I'm giving out.

Tobi: And they weren't even buying before. They were listening and they were taking a bunch of free stuff and thinking she's so neat, or that was so cool, or her life must be amazing. But there's a difference in having some kind of semi engaged sort of fan ish people and actual buyers that support your business. That's a totally different thing, right?

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Renee: Yeah. So, starting and then basically holding on tight can be really challenging to get through until you get some positive feedback. Once that net arrives and the positive feedback's there then you're like, okay, I'm in the right spot. But yeah, it was an interesting ride. And I'm still experiencing bumps in that respect.

Tobi: Rebecca, do you have anything to say about niche or in that area? I've seen you do some other cool things. You've created something that's like a mentorship for design students which is so cool. So yeah, how has niche played a part in what you're doing?

Rebecca: Yeah. That really stemmed from, I just have a passion to help people get started in their career of design. So, I constantly am barraged with students who are like, "Can I shadow you for a day? Can I do an internship?" Because we have a lot of local schools and are people looking for, they want to switch careers. I think interior design's one of the most common second careers choices. And so, they want to know about it, they pick my brain.

And I just can't take the time to have coffee with all these people. So, I thought well, what if I started a membership where once a month I talked with these people. They can ask me their questions. We have different topics we talk about each month to kind of really prepare them for what it is like to be an interior designer with a full service studio. And whether they're going to be an employee for someone else or start their own business right away. Which then I'd be like, "Now you're ready for Design You." But yeah, I'm just answering their questions, like what is it really like to be a designer?

And I also want to help them set them up with the right mindset because going into it, for me, I always knew I wanted to be an interior designer. And so that's what I went to college for. And one of my professors told me, and I loved him but he said, "You'd better be passionate about design because you're never going to make a lot of money." And I believed that. I'm like,

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“Okay. Well, a good thing I’m passionate about it.” And so, I just never thought that money would be something I could make as a designer.

So that mindset had to come a long ways and designing is really helpful with that. And so, I want other students to not be in that position. Most of interior designers are women and I think that also plays into it. So, this program just kind of helps them get the tip of the iceberg of what the career’s about, get them excited about it and say, “Yes, this is where I want to go forward.” Or if they’re like, “Okay, maybe I’m not cut out to be a designer.” So, there’s a lot to know.

Tobi: Yeah, that’s true, yeah, awesome. And so was there any other part of niching or anything that or I know even it’s just helped you like you said, with your own full service clients just to say, “Here’s the type of people we work with.” Because kind of the best friend of the niche is also the ideal client and really understanding who to weed out. Was that kind of where that work played the most role in your firm?

Rebecca: Yeah, because it’s interesting, it’s almost like I did the anti-niche course thing. Because my client, my ideal client is not going to be taking the course that I created. And so, this is out of my desire again to help and coach people. There’s still that need over there and I’m happy to have that for them. But my ideal client is now who I’m making my new course for. So, I guess I haven’t fully come around with the niche capacity. I’m moving from generalist into the new.

Tobi: You’re so like – and this is something that’s so true for so many of us. I mean I struggle with it too. The multi passionate creative, we don’t like to pigeonhole in one thing. Now, the beautiful thing about it is I think when you get all those built you may be like, “Well, now I want to make a whole lot of money.” And you’ll do what I’m doing currently which is weed all the other stuff out that I spent all this time creating and it was so fun. It was multi passionate, I scratched the itch. And now I’m like, but to really scale it’s about simplicity.

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And so, I think all of that is the evolution of this. I would say you can't – I mean I couldn't be where I was right now if I had denied myself the opportunity to do what you're doing and dabble and try and create other courses. And then decide what's really working, what's the best. And so, it'll be interesting to see if in a year or two you're like, "Okay, now I'm at that point where I'm like this one's the home run, let's really dial it in."

And so, I don't know that there's a right or a wrong. I admire people like Jill, and Renee, and Liz who pick it on the beginning and stick with it. But I would say I had to come around to that as well.

Liz: You don't have to say that I picked it at the beginning and stuck with it. Because you guys, I tried, I had out of the box design. I was upset with my company for a while, which was eDesign, and I didn't love it. And then I wrote a book for DIYers and then shelved that. And then somehow this course became this perfect compilation of all of those. And so, I don't know that I would have ever done the course had I not kind of dabbled and done the other, but it is a bit of an evolution.

Tobi: Yeah, every one of those steps. Yeah, it is an evolution and every one of those steps that – I was saying to you all before we started. I think the most important thing about this kind of growth and trying things in your business is less about the product you create and more about who you become in the process because I think what you just described, what I'm describing. I'm going to let Jill talk and see what she's going to say but it's probably related. Is that it's like each time you try something you couldn't do before. You're like, "I can't write a book." I just wrote a book.

I can't do the DIY thing and compete with my other high end service. I just did it. And it might not have hit the numbers we wanted. But I think each time we try something, Jill and Renee have both, and I don't know if any of the rest of you have done the podcast route which you both love, I love. All of that stuff, every time we do something and we prove to ourselves that it's possible and we grow, and we have those moments of pulling out our hair

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and gnashing of teeth. And how many times? How many times did you all try to quit in the middle of half of this stuff you're creating?

Because if I could have a dollar for every time I've said, "We're shutting this whole thing down, all of it. I'm done. I'm going to be like a real estate agent or sell an MLM or maybe just not work at all." And I love those kind of businesses. I'm not making fun of them. I'm just saying, whatever I can find. I'm like, "What would you be good at?" Then you can work all by yourself with no team members and never have to create anything. And then of course I come to my senses because this is where I belong.

But speak to that a little bit, so Jill, first, you were going to say something about the evolution.

Jill: Well, what I was saying with the evolution too, so once you create this niche, you're then creating services. And you mentioned the word simplicity. And I think the simplicity is great for us and great for the client. And what it's done for me, it's very liberating because it's like I have very specific services. So, when a new client calls me I'm able to say, "This is how I can serve you." And I'll even say, "If you're looking for x, this isn't what it does." I want to be really clear about that.

And it's really been liberating because it's liberating for them too. They know right off the bat, this girl's for me or this girl isn't a fit for me. I have one client, she was new, she bought a new house and she wanted someone who was going to be at that house every week with separate fabric swatches and touching this and having someone run around town. And I said, "I'm not your girl. I used to do that, that isn't what I do anymore." And so, it was great for her because she knew, you know what? I'm not going to waste her time.

I knew for me I don't want to be working with somebody like that. That's not what brings me joy anymore. And so, it also really helps, I just think, in your business get what your clients need, your desired tribe or client and yourself. So, it's really, that is another way that niche sort of evolves

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because it evolves into your services. And then your services really define who you're helping, how you're helping.

Tobi: Well, and I love that. I remember a specific point because I don't remember exactly how long you were in Design You but it feels like maybe two years or so, a while, we worked together for a while. And I remember a point somewhere in the middle, even when you had already started doing some of this. And I think it was you typed it in the feed. I don't think it was on a call but I'm sure it came up on a call. And you said, "I just had an aha moment that I'm still afraid to repel some people."

Jill: Yeah, I was.

Tobi: And then I saw you make that shift. And so now it's so fun to see how you fully own and you're so confident, like that, I am going to repel probably half or more of the people that aren't a fit for me. And that's what you want to do. And that's part of the evolution as well because I think that's part of what keeps us making all these different things, kind of the stage where Rebecca is and where I find myself often. Is that the guilt or the mindset, or something around letting people go and not helping them. And saying no, and saying, "I can't help you."

That in and of itself is an enormous mindset shift. And when you can do that there's nothing wrong with having a lot of different things. But life is a lot harder the more things you have, the more things you have to sell, the more things you have to service, the more things that you have the pressure to keep creating. And we love to create as designers but we create a lot of problems when we keep creating more and more stuff for ourselves a lot of times.

Jill: [Inaudible] about having a niche because you think, well, I'm going to just, and then the rest of the world's not going to come to me and then I lose all this money.

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But it's funny with a niche, you will have clients that aren't in your exact niche. I have a bathroom remodel I'm working on right now because they are clients that did do a digital bundle with me on a room over COVID, they're local. They liked me and I'd still take on a couple of renovations per year. So, they needed their bathroom renovated so I'm doing that. And did they just move from the city to the suburbs? No, they did not.

Tobi: But that's the thing. You're marketing, your niche can be one thing and that's what I tell people all the time. It's not for evermore you have to deny yourself. You get to decide, it's your business, you get to do what you want to do but it just makes life simpler. Renee, you were going to say something else too.

Renee: Well, and I think to Jill's point, I mean designers inherently we like to make people happy. And so, when someone asks us something we're always more leaning towards sure. And even in the back of your head you're going, I can't do that, no, can't. And so, when you have a niche you almost put your own guardrails up for yourself. And it really does empower, it empowered me. I did the same thing as Jill and I just, I said no. And it was challenging and I did get feedback. "Was it me? Was I difficult to work with before?"

Seriously. And I called the woman, this was over email, I called her and I said, "No, this is just not what I'm doing right now. And I really wish you success." But it's been two years and my business model has changed. And again, to Jill's point, I still decorate, I still enjoy it. But I am very selective over which projects will make it through the gates and into my project load because I'm laser focused. And because I've seen so much success with women being empowered by this course. So, I want to help more.

And actually, I fought this in the beginning was the designers coming in. And it was my team that was like, "We really need to focus on them Renee." I'm like, "No, it's a consumer course." And you get so tunnel

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visioned on it. And I was like, “I don’t want to spread myself too thin.” And the designers kept showing up. And so, it took me actually, not my team, it took me a little while to come over onto that side and say, “It’s actually the same product, it’s just coming at it from two different angles.” But ultimately it’s the same product and once I mentally got there then the work fell in place.

But yeah, the guardrails, I think, Rebecca to your point of these design students. God bless you, because I get those same calls and I just say, “No, I just don’t have the time.” And I think...

Tobi: Now you send them to Rebecca.

Rebecca: Yeah.

Renee: Exactly, and I will. I will because a woman called me actually. A woman called me last week. She wanted me to talk to her daughter. So, Rebecca, she’ll be coming your way. But you can teach them to create guardrails. We cannot be everything for everyone. And I think women in general stereotypically suffer from that disease. And then interior designers are just like the layering on of it. But creating a niche and sticking with it has actually really helped my project load entirely.

Tobi: Well, and one of the things I love about watching all of you talk about this and I know because it was my own experience. The reason I think you can stay in that niche now is because before you didn’t believe in something like a course, or other revenue streams, or a scalable product, you didn’t know how it would work. And now even if it’s not fully to the place you want it to be yet. You see the potential.

And instead of falling back into the mindset of I can’t afford not to take every client that comes my way. You can see if I say yes to them I’m saying no to this other thing that has so much potential or some other future version of it that has so much potential that makes potentially money while I sleep. But at least is one of me to many other people. And when we really

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understand that, and I think you have to go through the process of creating it, to fully understand that. You're like, "I hear you Tobi, I kind of see it." But it's not until you do it fully that you really, I think, start to understand that.

Renee: Yeah, it gives your business clarity I think.

Jill: And it's freeing but you didn't accept something and then the job that you did want walked in the door and you take it too. And then you're fussing about the job that you really thought I shouldn't take. I mean it takes experience of going through that to then realize, but it is very freeing.

Tobi: And it takes the experience of putting out, just like Renee, to get the feedback to know even what it's going to be. Everybody comes through and they're like, "I want to know the whole thing. I want to know the whole course. I want to know the end result of what it's going to be and what's going to make me money. I'm going to make one thing and that's going to be it."

And that's never the experience either because just like Renee, the whole reason that you all know me and we're sitting here is because in the last recession in 09 I created something called Design Camps that I thought was for consumers. And I thought it was in person locally. And then I put it on my blog and everybody's like, "Can you have it on the weekend so we can fly in?" And they were all interior designers. And then I thought they were coming for decorating which I thought was weird like Renee, because I thought don't they know how to decorate? But they wanted that.

And then they wanted to know how to charge. And then the contract. And the same evolution but if I had not taken that first step, just like you all, just like Rebecca. And I'm like, "What can I do in this recession? What are people always asking me for?" Well, they're always asking, "Could I just shadow you? Could I just look over your shoulder? Could you just teach me how you do that?" And so, I was like, why not? And I tried it.

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And it's the same story exactly in how the evolution went. But I had to put it out to get the feedback to be able to keep evolving it to the thing that was going to become the million dollar revenue stream which is where we are now.

Renee: But then I think also to tail onto that, and I know you don't suffer from this but I did start telling about my course while I was creating it. And I clearly was telling the wrong people. They were like, "Everyone knows how to do that, Renee. No one's going to buy a course for that." And I would go back to my team and they were like, "Ask them if they've ever taken a course." And the answer was a resounding no. And there is a different mindset to how people take in knowledge. And I learned that, basically to keep it to myself until I got it to a point where it was all finished.

But, Tobi, I know that doesn't, you don't strike me as someone that that would veer you off course. And it did almost veer me off course.

Tobi: Meaning hearing the negative feedback, all the naysayers?

Renee: Saying like, "That'll never work. Why are you wasting your time?"

Tobi: Yeah. I'm sure it did at one point, I've just been probably doing it 10 years longer than you. But I'm sure it did impact me at one time and you have to put blinders on. And you have to understand that they don't know, yeah, they don't know. And like you said, people don't like us to change. I remember one time when I first started doing, before I even had a digital product, when I just had online, I mean in person seminars and my designer MBA.

And my grandmother said, "So you're not a designer anymore?" I'm like, "No, I'm still a designer." And she's like, "Well, I just don't understand. You're either a teacher or you're a designer." She could not hold space for me to be more than one thing and to see how they were related. So, I just dropped it. And the reason that she was invested is because she loved

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getting attention when I was doing design because if I got in a magazine she could show all her friends.

And so, then she's kind of like, "Wait, my gravy train is leaving. What am I going to show people? We're not going to have anything to talk about at bridge if she's going to stop doing projects." But it was so funny because it was just, I'm like, even if the people closest to you don't understand that's why we have a community like Design You who does understand, because you're right, you're going to hear so many things.

And I equate it to like when our clients call us and the paint's going on the wall. And they're like, "Well, the plumber said he really doesn't like it." And I'm like, "Okay, well, stop taking paint advice from the plumber and I'll be over and check it but I'm sure it's fine exactly how I planned it.

Renee: And is the plumber moving in, right?

Tobi: Yeah. And it's kind of like what you're saying, you're like, I'm getting advice from people that either aren't my ideal client or don't even understand it or whatever. But I'm still hearing it as negative and it can stop you in your tracks, yeah.

Renee: Yeah. And often it comes in the beginning stages. I was enthusiastic that was going on, people were asking me, "What are you up to?" And these are family and friends, of course I'm telling them. And then the crushing blows of, "Well, that'll never work. Why would anyone?" No, everybody knows this. And yeah, the team quickly sealed me off basically from everybody. And they said, they go, "Just don't discuss it with people who don't understand the process." And it worked, it really did because I just sort of went under and didn't discuss it with people.

But to your point, Tobi, I have people locally who are like, "So you're not decorating anymore?" And I said, "No, of course I'm decorating." It's just this is where my expertise really truly lies. And this is what really gets me jazzed in the morning is to walk on. I mean my contractors make fun of me.

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I get really, so they're like, "You're excited aren't you?" I'm like, "I love the first day of the job." And they're like, "To me, it's a new job, different day." But you do, people want to pigeonhole you into doing one thing. They can't see you doing more than one thing at a time.

And I think, I said, "Nothing really has changed. I have always done construction and I've always done interior design and interior decorating every year, there's just a blend."

Tobi: I'm just talking about it differently.

Renee: Just talking about it.

Tobi: I've just focused in, in a way. But that's the beautiful thing because now you at least know it's working even if it's repelling those people. If they're all, "Oh my gosh, I had no idea." Then that is because it's the first time we've probably clarified our message. So good. This was so fun. We could talk for four hours. I know we could. We'll have to do it again. But before we leave, why don't you all, if there's anything you haven't gotten to share or you want to remind people the name of your course or the name of your podcast. Remind them who you are.

And tell everybody where to find you because I know they're going to all want to go. And we'll put it all in the show notes and we'll share it on social and all that. But I want you to be able to tell everybody what you want them to know about you. So, Renee, why don't you go first?

Renee: So again, I'm Renee Biery of deVignier Design in Wilmington, Delaware. And my course is called Only Girl on the Job Site as is my podcast. And you can go onto our website and find all the details out and stick around on social media. We're actually going to be launching a second launch of the Only Girl on the Job Site program. And a designer course is coming next month in August.

Tobi: Awesome. Okay, Liz, what about you?

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Liz: Well, I'm Liz Toombs and PDR Interiors is my company. The course is Interior Decorating 101 Sorority Edition. You can find us on all social media, Facebook, Instagram, we're on LinkedIn. I'm on LinkedIn. I also host a podcast, I'm a co-host of a podcast.

Tobi: Yeah, tell us, yes.

Liz: Where we promote a number of small businesses specifically in our region and it's called Speak Your Style and I host it with Sasha Bowlby.

Tobi: Cook, okay, amazing. Rebecca, what about you?

Rebecca: Yeah. My business is Rebecca Ward Design, you can find me all over. And our website is rwarddesign. And so, you'll find information about the student membership that I have, so that's My Design Mentor. And then the course that I currently have is the Home Design Coach Course. And then one that will be coming out in the fall, so if you stay on the socials I'll be letting you know all about that.

Tobi: Amazing. And, Jill, what about you?

Jill: Yes. Jill Kalman Interiors, and Instagram is one of the best platforms because my linktree will take you to everything that you need. And my course is How to Accessorize your Home in a New York Minute. It's six video modules on all the hotspots of your home like the coffee table, the bookcase, all those places. And my podcast is called Welcome Home to the Suburbs. And it's wherever you get your pods.

Tobi: I love it. I'm so proud of you all. I'm so excited to continue to watch you. Thank you for being here. Thanks for letting me be a part of your journey. It has been so fun. And humongous congratulations to all of you because you did the work, you did the hard stuff, you stuck with it and it is just the beginning for all of you and I know that, so thank you so much.

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I mean isn't that just incredible? Isn't it incredible what these four women have done? And they're just four of the many people, the hundreds of people who have been through our program who are doing business differently. And so many of these people started before the pandemic, some started during, some started before, because they believed that there had to be a different way to do business. There had to be a different way that wasn't just full service interior design which when you try to take on too much of that can be so exhausting, so overwhelming.

Not that I don't love full service design, I do. But I just love that they could really see a vision for the possibilities of digital scalable products. And they leapt and they're having incredible success. So, if you want to do this in your business get ready. We're going to be opening the cart really soon, the doors to Design You here in just a few weeks. And the beautiful thing is we're also launching with this round of Design You, so you'll want to get in now if you want to get access to it, a whole new course, a whole new part of the program which is about the one-on-one design part of the business.

So, you can come in, you can learn like these ladies did, how to create something scalable and add other revenue streams to your business. But starting this fall, if you get in, in this launch, if you get in sort of the group, the class of August of this year before we close the doors. Then in September you will get access to our brand new course. And a lot of people don't even know about this yet.

This is the first time I've really started to talk about this on the podcast. And it's called The Design System and it's my complete design system, every template, every tool, every Asana template, every standard operating procedure, every worksheet. I mean there is so much stuff in that, it is literally step-by-step how to run your full service projects. And if I could have had this from someone a few years ago, my gosh, I mean 20 years ago, let's be honest, it was 20.

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If I had had this it would have literally changed everything about my life and my business. So, it's kind of like the most luxurious detailed version of a design business but sort of in a box because we put it for you in a course with videos and templates, downloadable swipe files that you just get the whole process. And you're going to be able to get that this fall in Design You. So, a lot of stuff is changing about Design You. You're going to want to stay tuned, watch your inbox if you're on my mailing list for emails.

Watch me on Instagram Live, listen to other podcast episodes coming up, come to my webinars and Q&As that are coming soon because really Design You is about, let's see, it's either three or four years old. And it was time for a refresh and so it is changing a lot. All the good stuff is staying. We're cleaning some things up. We're simplifying, we're making it easier for you to not get overwhelmed and we're also introducing this new design system which if you run one-on-one projects it will change your life.

Okay, so if you want scalable, if you want one-on-one, if you want some of both, Design You is the place to be, stay tuned, head over to our website at tobifairley.com and get on the mailing list or the waiting list actually for Design You, if you know you want to be in there and that way the minute the doors open you will get the emails to say join us now. Okay, so I'm going to be talking about this a lot for the next couple of weeks, few weeks and it's some good stuff. So, meet me back here one week from today and I'll give you some more details. Bye for now friends.

Thank you so much for listening to the *Design You* podcast, and if you are ready to dig deep and do the important work we talk about here on the podcast of transforming your mindset and creating a scalable online business model, there has never been a more important time than right now. So join me and the incredible creative entrepreneurs in my *Design You* coaching program today. You can get all the details at TobiFairley.com.