

Ep #232: Showing Up as Your Complete Self on Social Media with Teri Moore



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 232.

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, friends. I have – I almost said fun, it's fun for me, an interesting episode for you today. I think it's really going to enlighten some of you, especially if you're in the interior design business. Today I have my friend, Teri Moore. And Teri is an interior designer in Nashville, Tennessee, whose successful design business was really on the brink of bringing her stardom like a TV show kind of stardom right at the beginning of the pandemic.

When not only did everything shut down from COVID but her home the week before COVID or maybe two weeks before, was completely devastated by a tornado, her home, her neighborhood. And so, two years later she's still rebuilding her home, her business, her family's sense of security. But through that process she really, I guess, in essence was forced to reconsider her own idea of success. And what really happened is Teri began to evaluate whether her priorities or what she thought were her priorities were really in line with the life she wanted.

And she is such an inspiration to me plus a good friend. And I just wanted to bring her voice here to *The Design You Podcast* I wanted you to hear from her, hear how she thinks, what she's learned, and it just might shed a little light on some things for you if you're trying to create success either in the design business or another creative arm adjacent to the design business. And you just keep wondering why the hustle and the version of success you thought you wanted just never seems to work.

So, I hope you enjoy this episode. I know you're going to learn a lot. So here is my conversation with my friend Teri Moore.

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Tobi: Hey, Teri, welcome to the Design You podcast. I am thrilled that you're here first of all. I kind of seriously have a crush on you, no kidding. Not like I want to date you. Well, maybe, but just like I have a crush on the way you live your life. I'm so enamored with your realness, and your humor, and I don't know. So, I'm so glad you're here. Don't take that the wrong way. You're like, "I need to go now this has already gotten creepy and stuff." Number one.

Teri: No, no. Oh my gosh, thank you so much for having me. And then secondly, that is the sweetest, best intro that I think I've ever heard in my whole life. I have a crush on you. I think we've been trying to set this up for a while now, trying to get together. We even ran into each other once.

Tobi: Yeah, at Disney. We were walking across a bridge and we were like, "Teri", "Toby. Hey." Yeah.

Teri: It was funny because I think you probably saw me. You see me at my worst. I mean we were 100 degrees, sweaty, my child was losing it. We were actually leaving because I was like, "We need a break for this." We were leaving. So, if you still have a crush on me after that.

Tobi: Well, I do, I definitely still do. And the more I follow you and connect with you, the more I have a crush on you. So, it's not waning, I'll just say that.

Teri: Thank you, that's so sweet.

Tobi: Well, I really do, I think we're going to get into such a fun and interesting conversation today. We're probably going to blow some people's minds. But as I was telling you right before we started recording, it's just so much more interesting to me to interact with people in a real world, to see the real version of themselves. I mean we're going to talk a lot today about how we come from this industry that nothing is real, everything is fabricated, and orchestrated, and the highlight reel.

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And so, I think I'm so bored with that version, even in my own life, that when I find other people that are willing to show up in an authentic way it's just so engaging, and refreshing, and magnetizing for me. So, I think that's what it's about, yeah.

Teri: Thank you. So, I am an interior designer in Nashville, Tennessee. So, I grew up in Nashville. And I have a really strange southern background. You can't hear it in my accent that I'm southern. I live in this city that's always been a little bit more cosmopolitan even though we're the country music city. I feel like it's always felt a little bit removed from the south. And then I grew up in a southern Baptist church. And my family was very, you know, the quintessential southern woman. I was raised by the woman who did not leave the house without make-up on and a full head of hair.

And everything had to look a certain way. But then I had this really interesting juxtaposition which was that my household, what was actually happening behind the scenes was just sheer chaos. It was my parents just could not keep things together in our house. I feel like we were struggling financially a lot of my childhood. So, things were falling a part a lot. And then there was just a lot of my parents, I've talked about it publicly before so I feel like I say it.

My parents do their best but they are hoarders. I grew up in a hoarder house. I grew up in a house where no one could spend the night. No one was allowed over. I wasn't allowed to have friends over. And they were also very strict parents. There was a lot of concern about they were raising three girls so it was making sure their girls stayed on a certain path. And lots of expectations about what that meant. And it was weird because I never was able to really meet those expectations.

My family was like the softball family. They were really into sports. That was not me. I was the nerdy theater kid. I was the class president. My grades were always amazing. I was doing all of the things that you would ordinarily see as that would bring pride to the family and somehow that just didn't seem, there was just something that was slightly off and we couldn't

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put our finger on it. And then I came out when I was 13. So, I think it was like, that's the thing.

That's the thing that it's going to be the real problem for us here. So yeah, I'm pretty accustomed to this idea of the perfection, the views that you see are perfection and then how chaotic it can truly be inside someone's actual life. But I also spent so much of my childhood doing what I now know is escapism. I was not the kid that watched cartoons. All of my friends were watching Nickelodeon and listening to popstars and things like that. And my stars, the stars that I loved were Martha Stewart, Christopher Lowell, Debbie Travis.

Tobi: Bob Vila, I think you said you watched This Old House.

Teri: This Old House. So, I joke that Bob Vila and Martha Stewart raised me, [inaudible] because that's what I spent Saturday mornings doing. I spent Saturday mornings just completely enveloping myself in these other lives, real other worlds. And I grew up before reality TV so I couldn't see other people's lives, even if I think I could have, that's never interested me because you still see the messiness. And I wanted the beauty.

I remember vividly watching Martha as a kid and it was back when she had Turkey Hill. And she's on the property with this huge contraption that they've built to separate the pine needles from the rest of the kind of garbage. The nuts and stuff that you get inside the pine needles, I was like, "I'm going to have that one day." As an eight year old I was like, "Yes, this is the stuff I need to know for my life, to [inaudible], for separating pine needles from." It was the idea of all that perfection, the parties.

Just there was some glamor that wasn't glamorized. To me just having a house that was serene, calm, clean. Literally just clean was the glamor that I was looking for in my life, that I needed. And then that translated into my adulthood in this really interesting way, the second that I could I was on my own and I spent every weekend, every waking moment, I worked full-time but I was spending every moment decorating my house and painting a wall.

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Even in homes that I rented, my landlords probably hated me, I was painting over wood and making everything as perfect as it could possibly look while also having a really, really unstable life in reality. The reality was very unstable.

Tobi: Yeah, I can relate in a lot of ways actually believe it or not. I mean definitely the southern upbringing, the mom not leaving the house without makeup on. I mean the joke where you put your lipstick on before you go to the mailbox kind of thing. And you're kind of a combination in some ways of my mom and me. My mom was the one that grew up southern. Well, actually she grew up missionary, Southern Missionary Baptist, even a little bit more extreme, or structured, or whatever the word is for that.

So, she had kind of done some of the defecting from that herself but then I definitely lived in the super patriarchal house. Still to this day my parents have been married 60 years I think probably. And my mom puts my dad's food on the table and picks it up when he's done. And so, there was this interesting message for me of you can be anything you want to but the reason you can is because you were taught by a man. You can run a business because you were taught by a man.

You can drive a car, women can't drive a car as good but you can because I taught you kind of thing. So, there was this extreme patriarchal influence for me. And then my mom, I think she had come from a very humble background. She married into my dad's family who was more well to do. But she was the one that was always decorating every weekend. So, I was part of that. I was her little apprentice to the painting a wall every weekend, cleaning out a closet, organizing.

So, I can relate in so many ways to the things that you're saying, both through my mom and then through myself. We were watching those same shows. We were watching Elsa Klensch on the CNN, the style thing and just mom always has had an eye for style, and color, and quality, and form. And she's never exactly been an interior designer although she's worked

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with me a lot. But she just has that, it's just a natural ability but was also very interested in it.

So, I grew up making everything perfect as well and I feel like I didn't come out with my sexuality at any point. But with my coming out of the patriarchy, I feel like just happened maybe a little bit when I turned 40 and for sure when I turned 50. And I feel like I have completely for the first time revealed this other version of myself that's kind of been in there all along. And I know you have a lot of those same things that are true for you too of who you are.

But for you it wasn't turning a certain age, there was something else that kind of really made all of that happen in your life, like this literally natural disaster that hit your life and turned all the perfectionism and everything upside down, right?

Teri: Yeah. So, it's really wild. So, I started my design business and I was offering virtual services first. I was still working full-time in my corporate job. I was in healthcare finance which could not be further. But it was a good job. And then I had been renovating houses for 15 years. And a neighbor, I had always helped friends and neighbors and stuff. And then one day a neighbor asked me to help him with two bathrooms. He was doing a gut renovation because he had had a fire.

And he was like, "If you could just help me pick fixtures for these two bathrooms, that would be great." So, I did that and at the end of the project it was so beautiful. And I remember standing in these two rooms just in awe of what we were able to do together. And then he said, "What do I owe you?" And I was like, "What do you mean? You don't owe me anything, I'm your neighbor, I'm your friend. I've been doing this for 15 years." And he said, "No, you're a designer."

And it was like I could not get that out of my head. That moment just changed everything about how I felt about myself. And within probably two weeks I had registered my LLC. And was doing all this research, all of my research was leading me to – I had never been on social media before. But

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everything was 15 interior designers to follow on Instagram. And you see them and they have these huge followings. And I'm like, "I bet they're making so much money." And they have these beautiful portfolios.

And then you get to see the snippets of their lives too that are all kind of wound into their content. You see everyone knows the notorious photo of the interior designer placing the vase of flowers on a table. And everything's perfect, and white and blue and it's just beautiful hydrangeas. And so, I did that. That's what I did because that's what I thought I was supposed to do. And I'm still in Nashville. I was trying really hard to get into full service. So, I started going to industry events.

I started trying really, really hard to get to know the other, to network with the other designers in Nashville. And I spent about a year trying really hard to make friends in the industry here. And every conversation that I had, it was like I felt very much like this is not for you, you're not right for this. There were not enough white linen dresses that I could put on. There was not enough makeup that I could wear. And it was really depressing. I really started to feel like I was just never going to be welcome in this industry.

And so, I had to do things very differently. I got genuinely depressed from it, just I'm taking all the beautiful pictures, you can look on Instagram and if you scroll far back enough you're like wow, she really was trying. There is this one picture of me in this dress with ruffled sleeves and I leave it because it's just this constant reminder that I am capable of putting on a costume but I am so unhappy in that costume. I felt physically uncomfortable in that outfit.

So that was 2019 we bought our new house. So, we moved out of the suburbs where it was all perfection. The house that we were renovating was a suburban house, everything was coastal interiors. Everything was right on that niche mark. And we decided to sell the house. It was just too big and it wasn't a neighborhood we really liked. So, we decided to sell and move back to an old neighborhood where we had lived before and buy a

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much smaller house, a house that needed work. But we were like, “It’s a historic home, we’ll restore it over time.”

I had kind of made the decision that I wasn’t going to use my home anymore as my portfolio because I’d gotten enough clients at that point. I had full service, my roster for full service was full. So, I was like, I’ve got enough to fill my portfolio. I don’t need people to see my home anymore. And then in March of 2020 we had been in our house about nine months, a tornado hit our neighborhood. And we were super fortunate that we didn’t lose our entire home.

A lot of our neighbors did but we lost half of our house basically and then ended up as a result having to gut the entire house. And it was March 2020 so it happened the first week of March. And then by the second week of March the entire city shut down, the whole world shut down. Everybody was depressed. Everyone was talking about how difficult things were for them. My whole social circle was basically like, “I can’t do this anymore. This is too sad for me. This is too hard for me.”

And I didn’t have anything pretty to show. My house was in shambles. We were living in a 500 square foot detached additional dwelling unit behind our house which is great. Our neighbor had a place for us to stay. But I just couldn’t fake it anymore. I was so depressed. Every time I came to our house it felt like there was a new issue. Every time I came to our house another room had been gutted. And it just felt like my whole life was falling apart. And I wasn’t going to lie about it anymore.

I wasn’t going to say, “Everything’s pretty.” I wasn’t going to post old content which I know a lot of people had been doing. I just finally admitted, this is garbage. And once I did that it opened this brand new world for me. It shifted kind of everything. I felt like prior to that I had been on this track. There was a certain track, the track that you’re supposed to be on as an interior designer. You start posting your work, people see your portfolio, you get more clients. You start getting published in magazines. I got published in magazines.

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People were sharing my work all over the internet. I was on all these lists because I'm a gay woman so I was on all the Pride lists. Top 10 gay interior designers to follow on Instagram, I was on all of these lists. The press was so amazing. And I was getting, producers were reaching out about TV shows. And I was absolutely on that track to be what I thought what I was supposed to be, the famous interior designer. And then I just said, "No, that's not actually what I want."

I'm constantly screaming at people in my DMs on Instagram. I'm constantly telling people, "Whoa, you're stepping out of line here. You can't talk to me that way." If I started to share something about my personal life which all of my peers were doing but if I shared something about my personal life I would lose probably somewhere between 150 to 300 followers every time. And so finally I just decided instead of reacting to the pain that this is causing me, I'm going to cut it off at the beginning. I'm going to nip it in the bud.

And I'm going to be completely truthful about who I am. And the truth about who I am is that I am a gay woman who is an interior designer. I have impeccable taste. I can give you a beautiful room but I also have a whole life with complications. And I've had to be in therapy for the past four years. I am medicated. These things have to be talked about or people truly believe that it's just the designer placing the beautiful vase of hydrangeas on the table. And that everything in their lives is perfect until proven otherwise.

Tobi: Yeah. And that's what I love so much about you because I discovered you, I mean I think I had known about you probably but I hadn't really slowed down and paid attention, well, and that was a moment that we were all shut in our homes and we were staring at our phones for hours. So, I was looking at the stories more than ever and I started finding you and noticing you. And I can't remember who it was that first mentioned you, or tagged you, it was probably Carmeon or somebody else I was following.

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And then I was like, “Wait, yeah, I remember this person.” And I was looking and following, and so inspired because it was a moment for me of really doing in a lot of ways the same thing. I had done the whole list. I had checked a lot of the boxes because I’m more than 10 years older than you. I think I’m 12 or 13, 14 years older than you, I can’t remember exactly. But anyway, I had a head start. And I had checked all the boxes. And I mean it’s great to do and it’s fun to have success.

But it was so empty in so many ways and it didn’t make me happier. It didn’t change things. It didn’t mean you still didn’t have marital issues, or your house getting hit with a tornado. Or your family going through a divorce or all the things that people have. And so, in that moment when I was really one of the what’s called the great white awakening of really saying no more hiding my politics with George Floyd. I was stepping out, very few people were doing that in our industries. Very few people still are doing that if they’re white like us.

But because you were also being so transparent it gave me so much inspiration and connection. And I think I started messaging you and I was like, “This lady is going to think I’m crazy”, first of all. She’s going to think I’m weird. She’s going to be like, “Why is this pretentious woman reaching out?” And basically, what I was kind of saying was I’m tired of all the fake. I’m tired of the pretention. Nothing bores me more than seeing more designers who are trying to have the pedigree, or pretending they have the pedigree, or fake it till you make it.

Or somebody saying, “Oh gosh, I’m just so upset because the pandemic is here and I can’t take my annual trip to Paris because what every designer should do is go to Paris at least once a year.” And I was just like gross, gag. Everybody’s like, “Well, we don’t have any place to dress up.” I’m like, “This is the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I don’t like to get out of yoga clothes or pajamas if I can help it.” Somebody would take away my designer card because I’m not trying to put on an outfit every day and show it on Instagram.

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But I don't want that, I want to be comfortable. I like to work from my bed. I like real people. And so, we started talking and I think it even blew your mind that I was saying, "You're like the person whose checked all these boxes is saying she doesn't even like it and pretentiousness is gross, and boring, and all the things." Yeah.

Teri: When you showed up in my DMs I was genuinely confused because I knew of you because everyone in the industry knows of you. We have people that we all look up to, there are the designers who have the thing that everybody's supposed to want at least. You had product lines. You've got furniture. You've got fabrics. You had everything that I wanted. And you had it all in this really beautiful, sweet little southern package. And when you were in my DMs I think the first time honestly I thought someone had created a fake account.

I really thought someone had hacked your account or created a fake account. And then I remember telling my wife, "Oh my gosh, Christine, there is this woman", that I admire you and you're talking as if we are old friends. And you agree with everything that I've been saying. And there would be times, I started calling them follower dumps, even when I was still doing the beautiful photo sessions and everything was perfect, I would just once every couple of weeks just do a check-in. I loved stories. Stories were always my favorite.

So, I would go into my stories and I would say something that was beyond just liberal politics. I am a very extreme to the left liberal. So, I would say something about like Treyvon Martin, or Black Lives Matter before 2020, before everybody was paying attention to it because I'm very fortunate. I grew up in a city that was very diverse. So, I have the upbringing with very diverse people who I can call good friends. So, it's always been a topic in our conversations.

So, when I realized that people would skeet if they heard about my wife, then I realized that they'll probably skeet if they hear how I really feel about things too. And they don't deserve my free content. I'm giving them

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something for free and they don't deserve it. There was a person one time who told me to stay in my lane. They responded to a story and then they said, "Stay in your lane, you are an interior design account and we don't want to hear about your politics." That's all it took, was one person saying that. First of all, I'm not an interior design account. I'm not an account at all. I'm a human being.

Tobi: Exactly, yes.

Teri: There's a person back here typing to you. There's a person on screen, you can see my face. I am a human being who happens to be an interior designer and you've stumbled upon my account. But that doesn't mean that you get to dictate the way that I handle myself online. I'm allowed to talk about whatever I want. And my life is a lot more than just curtains. There's this ongoing joke, it's just curtains. And I'll say that to myself when I'm starting to get really stressed.

You know install days. Install days are just hectic, they're stressful. 50 of the things that you thought you were going to have, haven't arrived yet. Or something's arrived broken and it's just so stressful. I have to tell myself it's just curtains. But also, I have this thing where I say, "It's not just curtains." There's so much that goes into what I do for a living. But I am not just curtains. I'm not a professional curtain installer. I am a human being and I happen to install curtains for a living.

It's such a weird industry because like fashion, fashion is so tied into interior design and I love fashion. It really is, I just like looking at pretty things. I love thinking about the art that it takes, the mindset that it takes for someone to develop clothing. You will not see me posting about fashion other than one time when someone sent me a screenshot of me wearing a pair of pants that I was like, "I feel good."

Tobi: Meaning yourself and we won't see you posting yourself in fashion?

Teri: No. Yeah. Because that's just not where my brain is anymore. Now, maybe, maybe as I get older I'll think about it. When I'm in my 60s, am I

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going to suddenly go back to those days of full face of makeup, and glamorous clothes just to prove that I can still be a sexy woman in my 60s? Probably because it's subversive. Anything that's subversive, I'm for it. But I don't know, I just can't keep up anymore, the more I try the more it kills me.

Tobi: Well, yeah, and what I love about what you're saying because you're right, we do agree on so many things, especially our politics. And we have a lot of fun in DMs just complaining and cursing about things that are happening in the world. But I'm so with you on fashion, and design, and I'm not even saying I don't want to go to Paris at times. And understanding it as a craft, and a skill, and a talent, and hard work, that's one thing.

But the opposite where it's using it to put yourself on a pedestal to create a hierarchy where you're better than somebody else, or you're more qualified to be an arbiter of style and taste, and you're the one who gets invited to the parties. That's the part that I hate so much. I think it goes against everything at my core, this just kind of justice and inclusion thread that's like at my core of who I am as a person.

I mean I'm the mom who my daughter's like, "Well, we're not inviting so and so." And I'm like, "Then we're not having a party." Because we're not those people who are these four girls are amazing and the rest of you suck. That's not who we are. It's not who I am and I'm not going to be part of that. And so, I think that's the part that I tried, I checked all the boxes, I did all the things. I even got on the list and invited to the parties. And even at that I never felt like I was part of the in crowd because it's all made up. It's not substance. It's not that the people are all fake to their core.

There's interesting people there but when we're all playing the game of trying to show that we should have gotten an invite to the party or on the list, or whatever, that's the part I hate so much. I mean it's the same part that you were saying you weren't getting included in your circle in your own town. I feel that so much. And that's the part that I don't like about this industry.

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If we just go to the core of are people brilliant and do they make the most innovative unique out of the box incredible things I've ever seen, if their artist or designers? And do I love creativity? Hell yes. But it's the hierarchy that I hate so much.

Teri: It's very elitist mentality. I ruined a pair of my favorite shoes going to a television premiere that I was invited to. I won't say what show but it's not design but home centric industry. And it's a couple of influencers who started a business. Their business is amazing. And I think they're probably very nice people. And this event was really at the time, everybody was just showing images and pictures. And everybody was like, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe you've got to go, that's so cool."

But what no one said was, the tent flooded and we were all walking around in what appeared to be carpet shampoo bubbles. There's a picture of my full body but you can see me standing in what looks like foam. There's so much that no one says because we want people to believe that this does not pertain to you. So, we can't give you the flaws in it either. I all have but stopped doing full service design because I just was never willing to charge what it really required to do full service design.

Tobi: Yeah. That's so interesting you bring that up. Tell me more. And I was just looking at something last night that I'll tell you about that's so related to this. I love what you're saying but tell me more about what you mean.

Teri: So full service design takes at a minimum at least for me about six months. It's about six months' worth of work. And I would charge a flat rate at first. And then that rate just, I was like, "It's not enough." But then I started charging what I have always referred to as GC prices or project management prices, 20% plus a 10% overhead. And because my budget minimums are so low I just don't have it in me to tell someone they need \$150,000 to redo their dining room.

I can't do that, that breaks my heart. Setting the barrier of entry so high just is not in me. So, my budget minimums were 10 grand a room which I know you know is impossible.

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Tobi: Yeah, totally.

Teri: It's so hard. So, what I ended up doing was barely making any money if I made any money. And a lot of times my projects I ended up in the red. I ended up spending my own business money to try to finish things because you can't be a perfectionist that doesn't charge anything. That's very hard. So, I kind of stopped. I mean I've raised my budget minimums now to 15 and that's just for a standard room.

I won't do baths, I won't do kitchens anymore. Those are two things that because of the prices, the way that the industry just took off after the pandemic and the pricing has gotten so out of hand that I can't even do them. In Tennessee you have to have a general contractor's license to manage a project over \$35,000. And I don't know anyone who can do a kitchen for \$35,000, not a kitchen that they want. You're not going to a designer for a kitchen like that.

Tobi: No, you can't even really get the appliances for that much probably.

Teri: Right, exactly, at this point. And it feels weird because I'm like, this sounds like the elitist stuff that I don't like hearing. But it's also true, interior design is a luxury service. So, I figured out a way to make my services available to people who could not pay those luxury prices. And that was I started my career in virtual, I had at some point stopped doing virtual design altogether because I was so booked with full service. I have gone back to almost exclusively doing virtual.

I've had one full service project this year. And it is, I started charging 250 for a design because I was like, "Well, I'm not a real designer." And through the years I have gradually, the more I talk to peers, they're like, "You're charging too little." Our mutual friend, Carmeon just went off on me one time. She was like, "I can't believe what you are charging." And I think I was charging, that was not even – I thought I was charging so much money at the time. I had just raised my rates and she was like, "No. This is not okay."

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So, I'm now in a place where I can live off of virtual design services alone and they're really inexpensive when I compare everything else the industry has to offer. I charge \$1500 for a standard room package and that's everything. You're getting the whole thing, a pricelist. The only difference is I'm not coming to your house. I'm not charging you for the time that I spend there because you know what it's like to unwrap a lampshade. Do you want to pay someone \$250 an hour to do that? That is the most tedious task.

Tobi: And some people do but not the people that you're talking about working with, yes.

Teri: Yeah, not mine, [inaudible] it so that everyone can kind of afford and still everyone can't and [inaudible]. So, I feel justified in raising my rates because I know that I have all of this content that I've created over the years where people can go read about how I hang curtains, how I change the stain on a piece of furniture that's laminate and not really wood. How I do all of these things that they can also then do in their home. Because the labor is the part that costs so much money.

And if I can encourage someone to work with a designer so that you have a plan and then take that plan and put it in place on your own throughout time. That is, I feel like I've found my actual passion in life.

Tobi: Yeah. I love everything you're saying. So, it relates to a lot of things I've been reading. I've just been doing a bunch of continuing ed the last week or two because I'm WELL certified. And so, I needed 30 hours that I let sneak up on me. And one of the things I was listening to was talking about the design industry, and shifts, and changes, and resiliency in the industry. It was talking about COVID and design. And there was a study and it's just one. And this is a little hard to get my head around. I don't even know if I fully believe it but I don't not believe it.

But it compared some different industries and the burnout in interior design in this one particular study was for designers was higher than for nurses which is fascinating. But I understand in a lot of ways why there's so much stuff out of our control, there's so many details. We're wearing so many

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hats. We're the courier, the delivery person, the cleanup crew, the problem solver, fixer, call me any time day or night, no boundary. There's so much to that job of full service design that you're so right, you have to charge so much to really deliver it.

And then you put the price of product on top of that, and it prices almost everybody in the country and the world really, but speaking in just America, it's the tippy top of the 1% that can really afford those jobs. Even people that make a million dollars a year don't always have the liquidity to spend, obviously a million dollars on a home interior, or \$300,000, or 500 at a pop. It's so much money. And so even though I do those luxury projects it's so interesting to think about what you have to charge to make it worth what you go through to deliver it, that people just don't really understand.

So then if you're making it inaccessible to 99.9% of the population yet all humans deserve beauty and function. So, there is a whole disconnect there that goes against, I'm sure your values and mine. Not to say that people with money aren't allowed to have beautiful things and spend their money how they want to. I'm not anti-affluent. I get to spend money on myself in a lot of ways and that everybody can't do.

But then I was listening to something last night, it was more talking about the coaching industry. But it was doing the math and I was just relating it to the design industry and it was saying that people who have these high ticket coaching packages, same thing, and I do that as well, price the average person out of getting this kind of help. Because almost nobody can just spend \$1,000 a month on coaching or whatever as humans.

But it was saying that when you keep raising the prices, which is what we have to do in interior design to make it work, unlike coaching which is just a service that you provide and it doesn't have all those details. What you end up doing, I mean this is capitalism in a nutshell but you end up creating a price you're willing to work for but the price outpaces the value of the thing to the bulk of the people. And then we wonder as interior designers why we have a hard time making a living or getting clients, or having a full pipeline.

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But we've kind of had to price ourselves with outside the market demand because there's so many people willing to do it and willing to do it for cheaper, it's just broken in so many ways. And I think people don't talk about that either because they think, we're just price gouging people. It's hard as crap to do this work and it's just hard to run a business as an interior designer. It's hard to stay in business. It's hard to make money. It's hard to make profits. It's hard to all the things. And I know you've talked about that some on your own feed.

But what comes to mind when you think about this conversation? Because I know you've been so real about this. And this is the other part nobody wants to talk about. They want to show the highlight reel and not only are they not showing that they're standing in carpet suds, they're also not showing they aren't sure they can make payroll this week, or that if they have employees at all and if it's just them. Not sure they can pay their mortgage because there's such a feast and famine to that pipeline. And I think it's the math of us really pricing ourselves out of reach for 99% of the population, right?

Teri: Yeah, I think for me the thing that I've realized over the past couple of years, so I attempted to take a course about the business of interior design at the beginning of my business. And this is when I'm just hemorrhaging money to keep, just to stay in business I'm just hemorrhaging money. And I remember the course was \$5,000. And I remember there being this moment where I was like, at what point do I make that money back? Do I make that money back? And realizing that was beyond my capability.

The person teaching the course is someone I really, really, really admire. And I really truly believe she's helped a lot of designers who were farther along in their careers but I couldn't do it. I couldn't spend that amount of money. So, what I ended up doing was just spending literally, I think probably the first year developing contracts, developing messages that I would send to new clients, developing an intake form. Because these things were just not available. They're not something that was available.

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And it occurred to me recently that I've a lot of people who are trying to get into the industry or who are new in the industry, or even friends who have been here for a while and they're like, "I'm spending so much time on administrative stuff." And I just send them a Google drive, I have this Google drive with all of my paperwork that I use for every client. And the more, I taught a class this summer at a...

Tobi: The conference at Meridian, was it at Meridian or a different one?

Teri: Yes, I taught a class at Meridian which is a design influencer, design industry conference. And that class after I left, I was walking out I had more people come up to me and say, "I learned more in your class than I have learned in a year and a half trying to do this on my own, and Googling, and reaching out to friends." And it occurred to me, I made all that content. I've already made all of this stuff that I could just hand to someone.

If I remove the labor from it I can charge a reasonable price for that information which is something that we can't do in our industry. We can't remove the labor.

Tobi: There's so many middlemen, there's so many middlemen in the supply chain of product too. So many people have to have a piece of that pie that it's just so I mean inaccessible for most people to even furnish their homes.

Teri: Yeah. It's really hard because we talk a lot about wages in this country and how our minimum wage is far below a livable wage. I have found that a lot of my peers in the industry, I wouldn't say they're making minimum wage but they're not making – I mean they're doing \$100,000 rooms and walking away at the end of the day paying their bills every month and that's basically it.

Tobi: They're lucky if they're paying themselves \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year.

Teri: And I thought people were making millions. It seemed like coming into the industry people were making so much money. And there absolutely are

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people that are making that much money. But I think we've got to diversify a lot to be able to make that much money. It can't just be the client that you're charging. I currently have on my roster five virtual designs that are set to go for the next two months because I'll do two a month. And that pays my bills. That pays my household bills. That's my salary essentially for the year.

It's that I do two virtual designs a month and that's my salary. But if I want to make any more money to pay off some of the debt from rebuilding our house or go on a vacation, I have to do something else. And sometimes that means I throw in an extra client but for the most part what I've been doing now is behind the scenes. I'm currently working on a TV show that is not my TV show. It is not a TV show that you've already seen on TV. It's my secret project, has been project coordination for a group of my friends who are designers, who are currently filming.

Because they have one episode per project. They have six weeks to finish a three room makeover and there are six of these three room makeovers. So, they were like, "We need someone who's very organized." And we're in the field all day now. We can't sit here and do this. So, I've been doing that. I work with – there's a GC locally that I really love his work and every now and then he just needs someone extra to come in and coordinate between the project managers. There's a lot of work behind the scenes that I've been doing.

And I think I've found my sweet spot. I actually prefer that to anything that you can – to the portfolio work. I don't know if it's just because I'm in a certain place in my life where the pretty just isn't doing it for me anymore. But it just feels, it is almost as fulfilling as having a client come into a room and start crying. It's almost that fulfilling to me. To know that I have helped other professionals do things in a way that makes them money and keeps them on track and avoids all of the scary things that I've been through. We all have a list of things that we avoid now.

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So that's been really fun. And I've been thinking a lot, I would love to have a resource available for designers who are just starting out. People who just need to know, what should be in my contract? What's going to protect me? Because there is a lot out there that gives you really bad information.

Tobi: Yeah. This is the part that, just one of the many pieces that you're so transparent about that I think is so refreshing because yeah, there is always going to be a group of people. And I don't know if I've technically – I mean some people would say I've been in it, I sometimes feel like I was on the fringe of it. Don't spend a lot of time in it now. But there's always going to be that more kind of who's who of design or whatever that's put on the pedestals.

But then there's the rest of all of us in the world that have the job of interior design and have the desire to make a difference in all different kinds of ways. And I just love that you're transparent about what that really looks like because it's not all glam all the time. And I mean I do teach people how to create million dollar businesses. Not everybody needs or wants a million dollar business. I do know how to help a business scale. Not every business needs or wants to scale. That's only for certain people but that's all the stuff you hear all the time.

It's either the glamor of interior design or it's the glamor of entrepreneurship, and scaling, and all the things. And we just have this way in America of turning everything into this yeah, this elitist unreachable standard that we all kill ourselves. We get back on the treadmill to try to become that version of something. And I'm just at a point where I would so rather be transparent to go, "Here's a lot of stuff I don't like anymore." I don't like goals. I hate the word 'discipline'. I'm tired of forcing myself to do something I don't feel like.

If I see another person saying, "Create a habit and force yourself to work out because that's really good for you." I get that it's good to move our bodies and I like to walk and move my body. But to spend another moment of my life trying to force myself to be something that I'm naturally not or that

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I don't feel like doing. It just feels like constant gaslighting and you're not enough-ness, and be this be thin, be whatever. And I'm so over all of that. And I love that you're willing to also be transparent about being over so much of the things you're over.

Teri: Yeah. I mean if you think about the self-help community. So, this community that's motivational, it's bringing people, it's supposed to be helping people. Ten years ago, the advice was get up at five o'clock in the morning. But then a lot of people started getting up at five o'clock in the morning and they still weren't millionaires. So now let's get up at three o'clock in the morning. I will be damned. I am not getting up at three o'clock in the morning running myself into the ground, never seeing my family.

I decided what I wanted out of life and how much I wanted to work. And now I cater everything around that. I know that I am not working between thanksgiving and the second week in January, I don't work, period. You will not catch me working.

Tobi: I love that so much.

Teri: I just can't do it, first of all think about it. Going into a client's home during that time, it's impossible. They're trying to get stuff ready for the holidays. They've got family in town. I don't work. I have a clause in my contract that says that I do not perform any styling. I don't do any sort of installation if a non-household member relative is present in the house. I call it my mother-in-law clause because I am not going to spend my time arguing with your mother-in-law about how I should be decorating.

If you wanted her help you would have just had her do it for free. But how do you say that politely to a woman? How do you say, "Thank you, I've got this, this is actually what I get paid to do." So, I just won't do it. I just cannot do that anymore. I spent enough of my time doing that and I don't charge by the hour for most projects. So, every moment that you're arguing about how high the curtains should be installed is a moment that I'm making less, and less, and less money because of your mother-in-law's ego.

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Tobi: Yes, or yours. I mean or whoever, yeah, whoever's on the other side of that conversation, yeah.

Teri: Yeah. So, I don't work, that's my holiday break for me. That holiday break keeps me sane. I take spring break every year. I take fall break every year. Summers are very busy. So that's a hard time for me to say that I don't work because you know that, everybody wants everything done in the middle of the summer. But I do absolutely take one week of June and one week of July off so I can spend time with my daughter when she's home. The amount of time that I do not work keeps me capable of working the rest of the year.

Tobi: So smart.

Teri: And then I just have to kind of charge accordingly. I know how long it takes to finish a project. I know how much money I need to make in order to pay all of my bills that year. And live a comfortable life, I don't want a super fancy life, I just want a comfortable life. And then take on special projects when I can. I still overwork myself. I'm in a situation right now where I realized I've got more clients and more leads that I super overbooked myself this summer. But I think that I'm on the right track. I'm getting there, getting that healthy balance.

Because like you said, I don't necessarily want a million dollar interior design business. I thought I did, I really did. And then just there's been a lot of loss the past the couple of years. We've had a lot of friends lose people and we've lost people. And it's been a real eye opening scenario. I don't want to wait until I'm retired to have a good life.

Tobi: Yeah, so good. And to be honest I mean I have a million dollar business, it was a multimillion dollar interior design business and then really shifted mostly to coaching and consulting now which is easier. I will say it's easier because I was a higher profit margin. But to have a million dollar business which at the end of the day you're lucky if you make a couple of hundred thousand dollars take home yourself. There's a lot easier

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ways to make \$200,000 than running companies with multiple team members and many, many jobs and all the things.

And I mean there are some designers who end up making \$500,000 or \$600,000 but they're running \$3.5 million companies. And all the stress that goes with that. And so, it's proportional and nobody acts like it is too. You have to remember, yeah, it is possible to create that kind of income and result. It's just what are you willing to give up for that money? There is a tradeoff, there is always a tradeoff.

Teri: There's a tradeoff. In our industry we're talking, you can get it cheap, you can get it fast or you can get it good but you can't have all three. I have kind of gotten to the point where my realization is you can get it good. That's the only thing that I'm willing to do is just good.

Tobi: Totally, cheap and fast, it's not worth it and it's often not possible. So interesting. Well, thank you so much for this conversation. I've loved it. We could talk forever. I think is there anything else that you want to say about anything? I mean one of the things that we haven't exactly talked about that I do love about you is that transition from making everything look like the Martha Stewart pictures with everything the perfect to you just showing up as your complete self on Instagram and publicly which I think a lot of people are afraid to do.

And that's the most refreshing part to me, that's the most entertaining and connection kind of point for me with people is when they are willing to be themselves. Anything you want to share around that before we wrap up?

Teri: Yes. The transition was really easy for me because it just happened to come at a time where I was also transitioning in my personal life between having security and feeling stable, to sudden chaos which I feel like everyone felt to some extent during the pandemic. And then I also started seeing a different therapist. That helped a lot, having someone who was, "Why are you doing things that you don't enjoy and aren't bringing you any money?" Because my clients come from Instagram, 90% of my clients come from Instagram.

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But I don't want to work with the clients who think that it's okay to be homophobic. Those are the clients I don't want. I had one, it was so difficult. And I ended up having to fire them and that's awful. Firing a client is a really, really hard thing to do. So, it was a relatively easy process for me to kind of transition. I think it also helps too that I am funny. I do feel like that helps, that I have a tendency, I'm very self-deprecating.

So, when I say things that might catch someone off guard, or make someone feel really defensive, I usually I'll sprinkle in something that's a little bit self-deprecating to make it a little bit more palatable for people. I think everyone has the ability to evolve, not everyone, but a lot of people have the ability to evolve. And I think a lot of us who considered ourselves to be liberals, and antiracist, and a lot of us white women with the best of intentions were accidentally doing things that were counterproductive to the entire movement.

And I think it's been easier to have conversations about that when I say things like, "Here is something that I did. Here is something that I do. And here is now a new perspective on that." And I told people like, "You've seen a shift in me, you've seen me change. And thank goodness because if I were the same person today that you met five years ago, I guess I'm done becoming a person."

Tobi: You're fully cooked, you're baked, you're finished.

Teri: Right. Parenthood also changes you I think a lot too. My daughter is seven, I started my business basically just after she was born. And it was these two moments where I was changing a lot about what my life looked like. And as she gets older I see more, and more, and more in her that I need to address in myself.

Tobi: I agree. My daughter has been my greatest teacher. She's 17 now and she has been about my body, about social justice, about authority, about respect, about breaking the rules, all the things in the best sort of way. She has been my greatest teacher.

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Teri: I hate it. I hate it.

Tobi: I'm not saying it's fun to go through it but in hindsight when you look back you're like, "Oh my gosh, it's because of her that I really finally did the work about the thoughts about myself." I mean when I found myself judging her and thinking she's overweight, I'm like, "You're screwed up. You'd better fix that shit now. Because if you don't fix it in you you're going to do harm to her and who else are you doing harm to?" That kind of stuff, it is a mirror, it's an awakening. It's something.

Teri: I think my daughter is the most beautiful human that's ever existed in the entire world. And I'm sure that everyone thinks that about their kids but also my daughter looks exactly like me. You've seen her. I can see so much beauty in her and I can be so mean to myself in the mirror. And it's such a strange juxtaposition when I think about it. Also, I found myself jealous of my daughter's body. And she's seven, that's disgusting. What is wrong with you?

Tobi: Exactly, yes, that's the work I mean, yeah.

Teri: It really makes you, it forces you to see parts of yourself that you didn't even know were there. And try to figure out ways to be a better person. I'm a calmer person now, very absolutely. I think when you and I first met I would go into my stories and just rage. I would just be like, "I'm so mad about this one injustice. I hate injustice." I'm so mad about this one injustice in the world. And I would just be so angry. I have a slightly different tactic now.

I have noticed that I can maintain my own calm and still be upset about something. I can still – I'm actually far more articulate when I am calm than when I'm mad. Now, I'm not saying you won't catch me mad sometimes. But for the most part I just try to provide information in a palatable way so that people can take with it what they want. They can actually move forward with their lives with that information. We talk about everything, it's not just curtains and sometimes it's curtains.

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Tobi: Yeah, I love it, so good. Well, thank you so much. For everybody that hasn't been privy to the joy of your social media and your stories, and I especially love it when you bring your wife on and she is just so deadpan and it is hilarious. And sometimes though she surprises me. I told you the other day, I love the stories because her personality was really coming out. Ad you were asking her questions or something, it was so fun. So, everyone else can experience the joy of your social, where do they find you?

Teri: So, my business is called T. Moore Home. I am on Instagram. I'm on Twitter but not a lot, and TikTok and it's @tmoorehome and that's just T Teri, and then Moore is my last name and home. Yeah, so mostly I think Instagram's really the spot, that's where I hang out the most and my Instagram stories. Don't go look at my feed and expect that I'm going to be posting anything because I'm very reluctant to put things in the feed now. But Instagram stories, we have a lot of fun there.

Tobi: Yes, you do and I enjoy them so much and they add joy to my life so thank you for the labor that you're spending on your stories to entertain me. There are so many times that I laugh out loud, even this morning when you tagged me. And I was literally laughing out loud at your story. So, everyone find Teri on Instagram, you will love it if you loved this interview. And again, thank you so much, it's been a delight to get a whole hour with you.

Teri: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. And I would absolutely love to have an hour with you in person, so let's make that happen.

Tobi: You know what? We're not even that far apart. I can drive to you in an afternoon. It's five and a half hours or so. So that's really dumb that we have not connected in person yet so that will happen soon, I promise. And yeah, thank you so much.

Teri: Thank you.

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Okay friends, I hope that was as enlightening to you as I think it probably was, Teri and I both want to hear from you, we're over on Instagram as we just said. So let us know what you think of the episode, if it brought anything up for you, made you relieved, frustrated, scared, all the emotions because there's a lot that we really unpacked in this episode and did some major truth telling. And I think it's some conversations that really need to be had but people don't have them a whole heck of a lot.

So, I can't wait to hear from you. Thank you for listening. And I'll see you next week right here with another great episode of *The Design You Podcast*, bye for now.

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