

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly



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**Tobi Fairley**

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## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 255.

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.

Hey friends, I hope you're having a great week. I am so excited about today's episode. So some of you who follow me online, on Instagram and in other places have heard me talk about one of my absolute favorite books from 2022 that I read and it is called *American Detox* by Kerri Kelly. And we are so blessed today to have Kerri on the podcast. So the subtitle of this book is *The Myth of Wellness and How we can Truly Heal*. And it's really about the wellness industry and just wellness in general in America.

But I basically think it's just a primer for being an American and that everyone should have to read this book. There is everything in this book and you might be hearing me flipping through the pages right now. My book is covered in notes and comments and underlined and it's really, really a lifechanging book. And I think that not only is it a primer for everyone that lives in America, I think we should have to read a political primer, a national primer, a wellness primer, a personal primer for existing with other people socially.

How we've been socialized, how we've been taught to think and what we can do to increase the collective wellness and wellbeing of society. So I'm not going to belabor this introduction. I'm just going to get to Kelli's interview but quickly just so you know, she is a community organizer, a wellness activist and an author now. And she's also been teaching yoga for over 20 years and she's known for making waves in the wellness industry by changing norms, disrupting systems and mobilizing people to act.

And it sounds a lot like the things that I'm interested in and known for as well. Really pushing the envelope, bringing up conversations, asking the hard questions. And we have a wonderful moving, inspiring conversation

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

about all of this today. So enjoy this interview, this conversation with Kerri Kelly.

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Tobi: Hi, Kerri, welcome to *The Design You Podcast*. I'm really excited you said yes when a random stranger reached out to you on Instagram, on a Sunday morning or something and said, "Hey, do you want to come on my podcast."

Kerri: I mean it's my favorite way of actually meeting people. And, Tobi, it's really great to be on your podcast. And I was excited, once I looked into you and I discovered who you are I was like, "This is going to be a great conversation."

Tobi: Yeah, I'm so excited. Okay, so we were just chatting a bit before we got started but why don't you tell people first a little bit about who you are and just whatever you want to share with your story? And then I want to get into my experience of your book because it so mirrors your experience. My life experience is very similar in a lot of ways to yours. But then there is a lot of other things that if people haven't read it yet they might be really surprised to learn about you. So I can't wait to get into the juicy part but set the scene for us first and tell everybody who you are.

Kerri: I mean the shorthand of how I kind of describe myself when folks are like, "Who are you?" Is I say, "I'm a recovering corporate executive turned wellness influencer turned activist." And my book really tells the journey of that story. And that story obviously begins on 9/11. My stepdad was a fireman who was one of the first to respond when the towers were attacked and ran into tower two when many people were running down and out. And he like so many were lost when the towers came down and that was a huge wake up call for me as it was for so many people.

But I think for me everything that I knew about everything was destroyed in that moment and I couldn't make meaning of the world anymore. And so that is really what put me on this path of seeking the truth, seeking healing,

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

seeking recovery, seeking what life was really about. And of course wellness had the answer to all of my questions. It told me that I could get relief and escape my grief and my pain. It told me to look on the bright side of my really shitty situation. It told me that I could manifest my dream life, my dream reality.

And so I bought in hook, line and sinker and this is the story that I sort of tell in the book, *American Detox*. I really fell all the way in, hooked. And before long became a yoga teacher and wore Lululemon pants and Mala beads and would recite mantras to anyone who would listen to me. I was that annoying friend who was like, "Have you tried yoga yet?" And I was really inspired. It gave me a new lease on life. I felt different. I was in this blissed out state. I felt like I was healing from the grief. It gave me a new lease on life, there was a new direction to my life.

But before long I started to see the crack and not just in the kind of wellness world but in the world in general. I would walk out of my yoga studio and I would run headfirst into a group of homeless youth that lived in the awning of the yoga studio. And it was so contradictory to me that I would be having this super blissed out, enlightened, hopeful experience on the mat. And then I would walk out directly into so much human suffering. And after a while I could no longer reconcile that. And I realized that in fact I wasn't well.

There was no wellness when there was so much suffering in the world around me. And no amount of yoga and lotus poses and green juice and all the things that I think often the wellness industry prescribes to us can heal that kind of wound, that kind of suffering. And so that's when I started to sort of question everything about wellness and whether wellness was making us better or wellness was making us worse.

Tobi: Right. Yeah, well, and so many things I can relate to. I told you earlier that I felt like your book, although I picked it up because it is about wellness and the subtitle is *The Myth of Wellness and How we Can Truly Heal*. But it was everything I expected but really way beyond what I expected because what I really ended up feeling like when I was reading it is that it was really

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

just a primer that every single human being, and I mean I'm 50, I'm not 20. And I'm just now, I feel we're at the beginning of this journey in so many ways.

But that every single human being should be required to read this book and I do have a little bit of the benefit of being on the other side of some really deep work since George Floyd and some other things. But I didn't have a major catastrophe in my life that led me to these moments that happened outside of me. What I had was the buy-in to the American dream, work yourself to death, white girl with all the privilege but made herself sick trying to prove that I could do all the things and be all the things.

And so I kind of ended up in the same place that you were of this really sick overworked, overtired, every message I was getting doesn't work. And then when it would work at some level for me enough, like you said, for me to start thinking, maybe this yoga thing is what I need. Then you start to realize, this doesn't align with my values because why am I the only one that gets to manifest all these beautiful things like you said when collectively we're looking around and there are people working three jobs and not making ends meet.

There are people who can't afford healthcare. There are people who can't feed their children and it didn't work for me anymore. And my politics had always aligned on a more liberal side of me. Back when I was 19 I worked in the Clinton campaign. But waking up to my whiteness and my privilege while also experiencing and kind of in a way being the victim of the story that doesn't work of the American dream and all the stuff was so confusing to me.

Kerri: Yeah, disorienting, right?

Tobi: Yes, totally and that's why your book was so resonant with me, because it brings in not just the truth about what you experience but it also brings in like you said, collective care and social justice and humanity and all the other things that we've been, I guess, privileged to ignore a lot of us

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

for a long time. And we're in a tipping point I think in the world right now that it's hard to ignore it anymore.

Kerri: I hope so and thank you for saying that. I mean I really did try to tell the story of my own disorientation and my own discomfort and my own dissonance. Because I think sometimes people when they meet folks who are maybe more up on social justice issues or more political, they think you were just born that. No, the very messy unravelling and unlearning for me. And I try to tell that story because I want folks like me, especially white folks and folks with so much privilege and proximity power and resources, I want folks to know that it is a journey.

And it's no wonder that it takes us this long to see because the system and the dominant culture is designed so that we don't see. It's designed to distract us. It's designed to give us escape hatches. And I think wellness was one more construct of that. It was one more sort of pathway to turn away from the truth of who we are and of where we come from and of what's really happening in the world. And so once I started to kind of dig into that like you were saying, all of a sudden you're like, "Wait a minute."

And you start to dig and you start to uncover and you start to unravel the many myths that we've been set by dominant culture and by socialization. And for real, by the institutions that we moved in. I mean when I wrote about the healthcare system I was flabbergasted by how much blame the healthcare system places on the individual for what we know scientifically are symptoms and suffering due to social determinants of health and structural violence.

So every industry colluding with these myths to keep some people, very few people in power and everyone else desperate quite frankly, scrambling, what you described before, scrambling, overworking, reaching, trying to buy our way into wellness. And so once I started to uncover that I was like, "Oh, no." We need a realignment with what's happening so that actually we know how to get well, how to get free from this. And that was what really drove me to write this book. It wasn't a rejection necessarily of wellness. I wrote this book out of a yearning to be well.

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

I want to be well. I want all of us to be well. I actually don't believe that I'm ever going to be well as long as so many people are suffering and are being deliberately oppressed. And so I know that my wellbeing and my thriving is tied up with everyone else. That's what's compelling me to be like, so what is wellness really beyond the myths that we've been sold?

Tobi: Yeah. And all of that was so, so resonant with me and so just eye opening and educational. And I really appreciate all the research that you did because it doesn't come across because it's not, as just your opinion. But you literally, I can tell there's so much work to really help people understand how this is happening, where it's happening, who's perpetuating it. And I think a couple of the things that really stood out to me maybe I mean gosh, it's hard to say what stood out to me the most.

But as you were just talking about wellness and the healthcare system and the systems that oppress us and then also seeing the other side and knowing that I even was guilty like you, I'm sure, of the supremacy thinking of well, I'm well and I drink green juice and I do these things and we keep repeating the same pattern and calling it a different thing whether it's the patriarchy or white supremacy or wellness or something else.

It's just mindboggling how we just keep getting back on the same little kind of treadmill and perpetuating the same harms and beliefs and putting ourselves up on a pedestal so that we can like ourselves better. And we do see, it's confusing because you do get some individual benefit of yoga or destressing or drinking green juice or changing your mindset. But it's understanding the difference between the individual level and the systemic or structural level. And like you said, kind of unpacking the part that the blame is sort of backwards.

We're trying to heal everything from an individual level and we're also taking total responsibility at the individual level and that's never going to change the systemic, the institutional, the ideological, all of the things that have to change for collective wellness, right?

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

Kerri: Yeah. And what you are saying, I don't necessarily think that the individual is separate from the systemic as much as it's deeply interconnected. So to your point, there's a role for personal responsibility. There's a role for self-care inside of this I believe orientation. But it isn't separate or siloed and I think dominant culture wants us to believe that we're separate from one another, which is what's behind so much of our sort of zero sum dividing conquer culture politically. We can talk about that.

But it's also the way in which systems blame us for our own suffering so that we actually won't blame the real culprit because these systems are designed only for some of us and in fact, very few of us. A lot of us are suffering at the hands of the system and that feels really important too because I think that there's a delusion even among white people that white supremacy is working for us. And while we might be having some incremental material gain in how we benefit from whiteness and from white supremacy.

When I think about what we've seen in terms of the rise of white nationalism around the country, guns ripping apart in schools, communities. No one is safe from that. We're all going to be on the other side of that gun at some point and so that feels really important especially for folks with privilege and power. It's not that this is someone else's problem and you have to help them. No, no, all of our survival is actually dependent on our ability to sort of confront these really horrific and harmful systems that aren't about life. They're not about wellness. They're not life affirming.

They're not about safety. They're about certain people maintaining power, hoarding resources, controlling systems and other people's lives and the rest of us scrambling to try and get a little snippet of that. That's just not wellness to me, that's not thriving. And what you were saying before, I wanted to speak to just about how hard it is.

Even when you know, one of the things I often share is that I set out to write a book about wellness but I actually wrote a book about culture. Because the way that I have learned to understand how culture functions is that culture is the air that we breathe. Which means culture is not just

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

happening out there, it's happening in here. We're internalizing culture and then we're being trained in the culture. We're socialized in it. We're taught the culture in schools.

You see what's happening around banning books and that's so that we don't learn. But even institutions, I'm thinking about what we learn from just what we see in the media about which bodies are celebrated and which bodies aren't celebrated. What behavior is rewarded and what behavior has consequences. And so I think we're constantly getting these messages and it's pervasive, it is persistent.

And for me I've been doing this work now for two decades and even though I know cognitively, I was sort of blown away by how I continue to get barraged by that messaging, by the lies, by the falsehoods and the myths and the delusions and the disinformation. And so I just want to acknowledge that I think it is hard to wade through those waters. And I think it's important for us to actually name that so that we can help one another. So that when we see dominant culture projecting itself upon us and telling us what's right and what's wrong, what's good and what's bad.

I think it's up to us to help each other and actually calling that out and exposing those lies and saying, "That's actually not true." And I think this also speaks to how we have created conversations with each other and with our neighbors and at church and in the grocery store and in the workplace. Because I think we're all being fed really toxic messages that have nothing to do with our wellbeing, that aren't interested in our thriving.

Tobi: Well, absolutely and something that stands out as you're talking and I remember thinking this when I was reading the book and I thought this before as well is that it's so fascinating too. As a person with quite a bit of privilege and that is white, we're used to the whole idea of whiteness going, "There's a problem, I'll just nip that in the bud, I'll just fix that today." And so now we're kind of on the other side of this issue because we want to change things, these systems. We see how capitalism is broken but we still live in a capitalist society. And you still have to operate in capitalism.

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

So we're getting a taste of what people who have been marginalized for years have had to do the slow work and we don't know how to do that I don't think. Because we're used to just either throwing money at a thing or like you said, going down a rabbit hole of wellness and it's all going to be fixed. And I think there is a whole almost a grieving process and an awareness and some shame and a lot of other stuff that comes up when you realize, this is how other people have been dealing with these institutions, these problems for years.

We're sort of getting a dose of our own medicine so to speak but you can't just opt out either because that doesn't fix it. We have to stay in it. We have to stay in capitalism. We have to stay in politics. We have to stay in the wellness industry and that's what gets so confusing, exhausting, hard and I think that's what's been so helpful for me. I'm going to listen to your book on tape now. I read it and made notes everywhere but I need to keep reminding myself about some of the things that you help us understand because this is a long game to stay in this work, right?

Kerri: It's a long game and an everyday game and one of the things that came up to me when you were talking is also humility. I wouldn't, and you talked about sort of the references and the resources, I wouldn't know any of this, none of it were it not for the wisdom, the education, the lead of Black, indigenous, people of color, LGBTQ, disabled folks. I had to really go into a learning mode when I was writing this book and I really deferred to the expertise, the wisdom of the people, to your point, who know, who have been marginalized by these systems for all of time.

Who understand how to survive, and I say that because I think it speaks to who we can learn from and who we need to listen to. And it also speaks to the fact that white folks need to follow their lead. And I think that's hard for white folks sometimes because we're so used to being in a position of taking the lead or knowing what's best for other people. We have a very long history of missionary work and white saviorism and imperialism where we go into people's communities and we tell them what's good for them.

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

And so a lot of what that taught me was I don't know. There's a lot that I don't know because of my social location and my lived experience. And so I really need to own my not knowing and really listen, really follow the lead. One of my mentors, and I wrote this in the book, follow the people who know the way. And so I think that's important, and a kind of critical inquiry for folks like us. We just need to be like, "Who knows how we're going to survive this or how we navigate the complexity of what you described?"

And I think you're right, it's true that some of what makes this very messy and this is one of the falsehoods of wellness. Wellness says you can escape capitalism and make it conscious capitalism, which is just to your point, capitalism with a different window dressing. And in fact all the same trappings, all the same hierarchy and structure. And I think that's one of the contradictions we're going to need to learn how to hold is that we're embedded in these systems whether we like them or not.

And simultaneously we actually need to disrupt them. We need to expose them. Where possible we need to didact, we need to withdraw our consent from these systems. And so I think that to me that reminds me that we have power. That it might feel overwhelming that we're still kind of embedded in these systems and they feel unmoving. And yet I'm just thinking about what just happened with this election. We're seeing, even if it's moving the line inch by inch, we're seeing the people come together and push up against the system.

That's why collective power and people power is such a big part of my book. And what I believe an expression of wellness is that how we come together in shared practice, in shared values and actually embody our values and resist the systems that are trying to make us sick and suffer is in fact an act of radical wellness.

Tobi: Yeah, so good. To your point about following the people that have done the work, have been in the work, know the way or at least are many, many steps down the road, farther than a lot of us. I loved near the end of the book where you actually pulled in a group of people. And it was so interesting because there's a lady that you have, well, just for people who

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

haven't read the book, you have, is it five or six people, and you ask them specific questions and you have them all respond. And I loved it because it's so one degree of separation for me.

The lady in Memphis, I'm two hours from, she's friends with one of my friends who's in the design industry. It's a Black woman in Memphis and I'm like, "I have to meet this woman." But we think it's so much bigger than us and so disconnected from us and it's really not. It is us. And it's us in community with other people. And I really loved how you got these different perspectives from so many people. I was so inspired to go look up every single one of those people and know who they are and follow them.

But that you did such a beautiful job of helping us and you weren't coming off as the expert. You're like, "I'm the student of this as much as anybody else. Let me shine a light on these people that we need to pay attention to and listen to and amplify and follow." And anything you want to add about that, of those people that you reference in the book and that you learned from? Because I think it was just an amazing way to wrap up not just, okay, here's where we are, here's three small tips.

No, you're like, here's people in action doing this work. And I also as a creative, I think there were several of those people who were artists and it's not just politicians, it's not just people making policy, it's everyday human beings that have to do this work if we want to see change.

Kerri: Yeah. I was really careful to not call on the famous people for that, the conversation because to your point and I really love that you said this. These are people in our community. These are people next door who are already reimagining and reinventing and re-envisioning what wellness could be. And throughout the book, a big part of my journey in this book was trying to figure out what was mine to write as a white person, who is just waking up, what my responsibility was to the work and also to my own responsibility and complicity.

And in that last chapter I wanted to give people, I didn't want to provide people with what you typically get in a self-help book, seven steps to your

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

wellness revolution. I was like, I don't want that because that's just more of the same to your point. That's just more white people telling you what to do and how to achieve wellness. And so I was like, what I really want is I want to give people some direction and I want to give people an idea of what it could be. But I actually don't think it's my job. I actually don't think that's my role.

And this was my favorite project of the book, this was my favorite chapter. That's when I got to get out of the way and actually go to the people who are doing wellness in really radical and fugitive ways. And I talked to Taj Janes, I talked to Anasa Troutman who you just mentioned who's in Memphis. I talked to Dr. Jasmine Syedullah, who's a professor at Vassar. I talked to Teo Drake, I talked to Roshi Norma Wong, I talked to Mark Gonzales. These are people who I've been in relationship with for many years and who I've been learning from.

These are people I look up to, I respect. They're my teachers and they're also my co-conspirators and friends and they also represent many different lived experiences within the US. And that felt really important too that there was trans representation and indigenous representation and Black representation and queer representation and so on and so forth. And so that was a super exciting project and also just a really beautiful practice of remembering that. Writing a book is a very solo venture.

For people who are like, "I want to write a book." I'm like, "You should think twice about that, it's really hard." It's very isolating, it's like climbing a mountain by yourself. And working on this chapter, Reimagining Wellness in collaboration reminded me that we're not alone. And there are actually people who know the way. And there are amazing things happening that are already shape shifting how we understand wellness and how we be well. And it was the right note to end the book on because I went into a lot of really dark places in writing this book.

And I had to expose and excavate a lot of really hard stuff about our history, about our systems and ending with this chapter I feel, and I don't know that I would have written these lines had I not done this, had I not had

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

that conversation. But ending with this chapter taught me that there is actually more, that this detox that we all need isn't about less. It's not even about sacrifice as much as there's so much more for us. There's so much more possibility and potential and capacity and thriving that we are capable of that we're not able to live into because of these systems and because of this toxic culture.

But I actually needed to write, I think those are the last three words of the book, there's just more. And I needed to write those words after writing this book. I needed to know that in my heart and my soul.

Tobi: Yeah, it's so good. I've been really leaning into the journey of what it means to be a creative in this society and I saw a meme not too long ago and I've probably told this to 100 people. The meme was a picture of a little girl in a pool jumping to what in the picture would have been her mom. And over the little girl it said, 'students who memorize every word to get straight A's in school'. And over the mom was the school system or the institution. Then there was this kid who was literally drowning, his head was barely above water and it said, 'creative thinkers and innovators'.

And then it showed this skeleton sitting on the bottom of the pool and it said, 'creatives'. And I was like, "This is so true". Because you're going against the grain in every way to be an innovator, a creative thinker, a creative, or the concepts of the starving artist. But being where I am on my own journey and watching how I try to be a creative who also followed the 'American dream', the bootstrapping, the individualism that just literally almost physically killed me. It made me ill and sick and burned out multiple times.

And now sort of staking my claim and being willing to be a creative which is really calling me to be a rebel in so many ways. And so then when you had people that you were showing, to your point of there's so much more people that were taught that just life giving practices and creativity and all of the things they're doing. And we buy into the lie that to step away as white people from white supremacy or capitalism is we're going to have to give everything up and like you said, sacrifice and be less than.

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

And people just can't find themselves willing to do that but what they're missing is this whole other story that is kind of what it feels like to me to lean into truly being a creative but being willing to believe that there's so much more. And I think that's always true when you look at systems because anything that we can construct as human beings is limited to what we've known or seen or done or what we can imagine. And what we're talking about is something that nobody's seen yet and we can't even really imagine.

We just have to I guess have some faith and lean into the fact that we're moving towards more. Does that make sense? Am I getting too woo and spiritual?

Kerri: 100%, and I totally resonate with you. It's funny, I wrote this book and I refuse to call myself an author. And I had a friend who was like, "What's wrong with you? What are you doing? You wrote a book. You're an author." And I was like, "No, no, I'm not really. I just did a research paper and I wrote a thing. And I feel that way also about being a creative and being an artist.

And I feel that so much of that stems from scarcity mindset, from capitalist, from all of that really toxic indoctrination that if I'm not following the rules or producing some product that qualifies in the all American project that it's worth nothing and that I'm worth nothing. And so I just have to have a whole journey with myself also around what it means to be an artist, what it means to be a creative, what it means to be a rebel, what it means to divest myself from the system and choose to do something entirely different.

And also take on the risk and the consequences of that. That's been really messy for me too. It's not as simple as I'm eff you to the system and then you get to be a rebel. There's risks to that and there's consequences. And I think for me in my own journey where I've come to is that the risk is worth it. Humanity is worth taking the risk. Our collective survival given everything we're up against is worth taking the risk. And you were talking about before the tipping point. I do think collective consciousness is shifting. I think we're seeing that.

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

More and more people are waking up and coming along. I also think resistance is high. And I'm just thinking about the fierce and desperate call to return to normal after the pandemic, that people were just so done and they just wanted everything to go back to the way it was. When the way it was, was actually the thing that caused the pandemic in the first place. And so I'm just thinking about that pull. It's sort of like what we were talking about before. There's the yearning, the heart.

I think the heart's yearning to want to honor our values and show up for each other and risk everything for our collective possibility. And then there is that default setting, that sort of default operating system that's afraid and that wants the familiar and that wants to shape, shift back to the way things were because that's the only thing we've known. And so I just think those two parts of us are always at war with each other, they're always sort of battling it out for who's going to drive the car.

And I think that to me is actually where the spiritual practice drops in, the discernment of what will I choose or what happens when I'm not paying attention and I just go back to the way it was? That happens to me all the time when I forget who I am and where I come from and what's possible. And to be in this active practice of unlearning and of choosing, choosing to do something different. Choosing the risks we need to take for our collective thrival.

And being in that practice over and over and over and over and over again. And this is where community and collective care really comes in for me because it's really hard to do that in isolation. It's hard to do that alone. It's hard. So when we're actually doing it together, when you and I are in conversation then I'm like, "Okay, we can do this. We can help each other." When I forget, you can remind me. When you forget, I can remind you. We can bring each other along and hold each other lovingly accountable, to be who we need to be for the future that we all deserve.

And so that's where community comes in so strong is how do we build relationship and containers and community that can support our moving in the direction of liberation and wellbeing for everyone?

[The Design You Podcast](#) with Tobi Fairley

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

Tobi: Yeah, I was going to say the exact same thing before you said it. And I do think that probably my biggest most favorite takeaways from the book are the community piece and the collective care because what I have come to learn, if I just had to say maybe the most important thing I've learned in my 50 years is that the individualism path is the path that led me straight to burnout and kept me so isolated from these beautiful collaborations and things that just light me up.

And my creativity thrives in community. I thrive as a boss and later of my company now that I've created a company culture that is in community, not a hierarchical one. I had no idea for so long when I was really suffering and struggling like so many people are today that are trying to run businesses or work for other businesses. And they're like, "Why is this is so hard? And there's not enough time in the day." And I'm like, "It's because you're over there by yourself. You've cut yourself off because the world has cut us off and the systems have cut us off from everyone else." And on purpose.

That happened on purpose but we fell for it, we didn't know it but when I can now sort of look back or I'm at that 40,000 foot view looking down and I'm like, "It's so clear now to see." When I'm trying to do it alone not only does it not work it's what caused the health problem and the wellness problem and the wellbeing problem. And it's in community that all of those things are replenished and renewed and supported. And that's not a message we hear.

Kerri: We hear the opposite, to your point, wellness especially. I wrote a whole chapter about the self. Self-enlightenment, self-discovery, self-realization, the history of that and how still the wellness industry is still rooted in the glorification of the self. Which is also parallel to sort of the self-made man and an assessed destiny.

Tobi: Yes, rugged individualism, every tenet of politics we've seen in recent years, all of it, yeah.

Kerri: Totally. So you see these two things are exactly the same. It's so funny because I was thinking about you as an interior designer and how

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

you can cover things up, so there's still that. You can rearrange the furniture in a room.

Tobi: Exactly. Lipstick on a pig, it's still a pig, yeah.

Kerri: And so I think about some of these sort of wellness solutions or innovations I think are just masquerading, it's individualism masquerading as wellness. They're just covering up the toxicity that's the wound that's underneath it. And I think for us to be well and this is why I did so much digging in this book, we need to uproot these toxic wounds that we've been taught that have not just shaped us as a culture but have shaped our country.

When you go back to the history of this country there are deep wounds that have not been confronted, exposed, reckoned with, healed, made accountable for. And so I just think that it's not enough to be in the here and now and reckon with how things are out of balance or out of integrity in this moment. We actually have to go back and we have to repair our past if in fact we want to do the healing that we need to move forward into a different future.

And I hear so much often from people especially when we're talking about politics, "The past is just the past, just leave it in the past, now is now, things are different." In fact things are not much different. And we repeat what we don't repair and I feel like we're sticking to that in real time, that we're replicating history over and over and over again because we haven't dealt with it.

Tobi: That's so good. I'm going to write that on my wall. We repeat what we don't repair collectively and individually. Yes, that's so good.

Kerri: Yeah, because they're the same.

Tobi: Yes, they are, it's all, yes, it's all the same. So good. Well, I mean I could talk to you forever but the podcast does have to come to an end at some point. So I mean gosh, and we've only just tipped the tiny little bit of

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

the iceberg of what's in your book because it is just, I can't even explain to other people until they read it. We're going to read it I think in my community for the book club.

Kerri: Yay, I want to come.

Tobi: Okay. Well, we would love to have you come. So you can't know until you dig in not only the level of work you did and what you were willing to, like you said, feel and see and do to do this work, but there's a lot in this book. I mean and in however many 200 and something pages there is a lot in this book. And I'm going to have to definitely read it again, listen to it again, take it in again. But for people who are listening, there's been quite a few people who the last several years have seen me really be outspoken, not willing to hide my values anymore.

And I get a lot of feedback, a lot of positive feedback, a tiny bit, really not that much negative feedback believe it or not. But I think there's a difference in watching someone else do it and like you said earlier, thinking she's just that way or she's always been in politics or she's an Enneagram 8 or she's a rebel or she's a whatever, putting a kind of label on me. But what advice do you have for people besides picking up the book and digging in, which is not easy, it's hard to read. It's uncomfortable to do this work.

So what advice do you have for people that are afraid, especially a lot of white people? I mean I talk to a lot of business owners and coach a lot of business owners and a lot of the people they work with and for especially in an industry like a fluent high end residential interior design. It's hard for people to imagine being willing to be seen and heard on issues that align with their values because they're thinking about making a living.

So how can, not should I don't like any shoulds but how can people start to move into this work in a way that feels I guess at least somewhat safe in small bites for them to start kind of digging into this? Because it's not an easy path and it's definitely a choice because a lot of us with privilege don't have to pick this path if we don't want to.

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

Kerri: Yeah. I mean I guess the fierce part of me is like, “God, we should be afraid of actually not having this conversation because of the direction things are going in.” And one of the things I really tried to do in this book was model discomfort. And how discomfort is different from shame. I actually think shame is toxic. Shame is just another way we shut down. I think it’s a weapon of white supremacy and systems of power because it keeps us shut down, because it turns us away from one another.

And so reading this book and asking oneself hard questions, it cannot be about shame. It has to be about curiosity and compassion and the longing for what could be. And that’s why I wrote this book in the way that I did. I didn’t write it from a place of I know and I’m alright, I have already arrived. I wrote it from a place of I’m a mess and I have no idea what to do but I’m going to walk the path anyway. And when folks are always like, “How do I talk to people who are not ready?”

What I often tell them is, “Model it. Show them what it looks like to be centered in yourself. Know what you value. Just stand for what matters for you and to love and be kind and be compassionate anyway. Show them what it looks like to not be divisive, to not shame, to not dehumanize or put other people down or take from them or exploit. Show them what it looks like. Show them that there’s another way.” And I think the same goes for how we just live into communities.

Build a community that people want to be a part of that feels like the kind of home that they’ve been searching for, that gives them a sense of belonging that has been elusive in this country for so long. And so that’s sort of what I would share with people is this isn’t about being right, it’s not about being perfect, it’s not about being woke, it’s not about being the good white person. It’s actually about modeling and demonstrating how we walk the human path of growing and of unlearning and of discovering a different way of being together.

And that to me is how we organize, it’s how we have hard conversations with people who aren’t ready. It’s how we talk across the aisle is we just show people what it looks like which means we have to do our homework.

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

We've got to clean ourselves up and we can't replicate the system of pointing the finger or scapegoating or canceling people or shaming people. We have to have the compassion and the curiosity for our own journey if we're going to have that for other people. And so that's what I would say is show people what that looks like.

It's not about shame and discomfort is not shame. People are going to feel uncomfortable reading this book but it's not about feeling ashamed. It's about learning something new. It's about being out of our comfort zone. It's about being at our growing edge. And what I know about discomfort and I'll leave you with this thought is that if nothing else, discomfort is an indicator that we're growing in a new way. It's proof that we're changing or else we'd feel nothing. Feeling nothing is feeling nothing but feeling discomfort is often an indication, it's a signal that you're changing.

And if we can learn to see discomfort in that way we can learn to work with it differently. And then working with discomfort isn't a bad thing, it's not something to be avoided or shamed. It's something to be curious about, I feel something, what is that about, what does that mean? How can I lean into that and learn something?

Tobi: It's so good. Well, I thank you so much personally from me to you for being willing to do the work and not trying to be the expert but just walking the path because I think as I hear you talk about what you were just saying, it's such good advice. The creatives and the business owners and the people that I work with, that's what they know how to do best. We know how to create safe beautiful nurturing welcoming loving spaces for people to be their truest self. We've got that down all day long.

And so if we can just embody that and take it into this expanded community and pay attention to who we're including in the community and who maybe hasn't been included in the community. It's not, you're right, it's not this pressure to say I've got to go be this work person or this perfect expert on it. It's really just doing what we already know how to do and being willing to be rebellious enough to believe that community does matter. It's not about this individualist thing anymore.

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

So thank you for reminding us that we already in so many ways know how to do this work. And if we're just willing to stretch and expand and be more intentional of who we're in community with, that's really the first step that we can take, I think. And it shouldn't be that uncomfortable because again this is our sweet spot, we know how to do this already. We've just been denying it and turning away from it or taking the importance off of it and it's time to put importance back on community and collective care so that not just a few of us have amazing lives but everyone, yeah, so good.

Kerri: Well, I love that and I would even add to that, be willing to ask hard questions, even if you don't have the answer. Who is missing from this space, or who gets to make the decisions and why? Or why does this not feel good working here in this particular way? Or why am I not honoring what I need? Why am I turning away from what I need? To me those are questions that actually they don't need to be answered but they point us in the direction of something different and something better.

Tobi: Yes, so good. Thank you so much. Well, it was a joy. I definitely am going to reach back out. I would love to have you come into our community for our book club and just would love to stay in conversation with you. I'm definitely going to be following more closely a lot of the people that you highlighted in your book and on Instagram you have so much to say. So if people want to get onboard, where do they find you, they can get your book anywhere books are sold but where else? Is Instagram one of the best places to hang out with you?

Kerri: Kerri Kelly Yoga's a good place, Instagram, I love being on Instagram. I say lots of loud things as you know, sometimes funny, sometimes very serious and fierce and provocative. But often I'm trying to educate people and bring people along in this conversation. We have an awesome platform that we're trying to build around *American Detox* just for the purpose of being in conversation with people like you. And continuing to learn from the community, what do people need and what do people want to lean into and work on?

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

So @learn.americandetox.co, it's a book club with tons of resources that you can opt into. There's also an unlearning series that you can be a part of which is sort of breaking down each one of these myths, individualism and scarcity. And then we're doing retreats. I'm really curious about what this book looks like in real life, embodied practice when we're actually doing the work together in the same room. And so anyway so we're going to be digging into lots of different ways to connect and just expand this conversation with more people.

And so just keep tuning in and join us as we sort of continue to learn and grow together.

Tobi: I love that so much. Well, I will definitely be tuning in if there's retreats happening that are open. You may be seeing me at a retreat. But this work is so important and I really, really appreciate the approach you took. It really is different and it gives me a lot of inspiration for the work that I'm already doing and to inspire other people because again when we understand it's not our job to be the expert or to be necessarily the one with all the answers.

But just being willing to be transparent about our journey I think the more people we see doing that is going to inspire more and more of us to be willing to get on the path. So thank you so much and thanks for being here, it's been a pleasure.

Kerri: It's been amazing, Tobi, thanks for having me.

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Okay, so I hope you were as moved by this conversation as I was. I hope if you haven't read the book, you're now inspired to go out and get the book and check out not only Kerri but the other amazing people, creatives that we talk about in the interview that she talks about in the book. I think this book is so important and I think we are living in such an important time. And as creatives we have so much opportunity, so much power to change

## Ep #255: The Truth About Wellness with Kerri Kelly

the world with our craft, with our words, with the things we stand for in our social media.

And so if you want to continue this conversation please reach out to me on Instagram, please reach out to Kerri on Instagram, we want to hear from you. We want to know how we can help you continue to help us change the world one creative at a time, one wellness professional at a time, one online influencer or online social media account at a time. I hope that you were inspired and I'll see you back here next week with another great episode of *The Design You Podcast*. Bye for now.

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](http://TobiFairley.com).