

# Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Tobi Fairley**

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

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 256.

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 am excited. I say that every week, don't I? But I'm super-duper excited about this episode. So there is something cool happening at the High Point Furniture Market in April, it's really right before it called the, let's see, what's the actual name? I call it the Short Term Rental Conference but that's not the real name. It's the Vacation Rental Design Summit I think, if I'm being perfectly clear. Vacation Rental Design Summit. And you may or may not have heard about this event. You can totally go Google Vacation Rental Design Summit and see all about it.

But if you are a person who attends High Point Market or who wants to attend and is eligible to attend and that would be an interior designer, a decorator, an exhibitor, furniture maker, I don't know, maybe contractor. Well, whatever High Point requires for you to come there and be a buyer because it's to the trade then you could attend this event. And so today I have a conversation with the creator, the founder, the brain behind this brain just Jessica Duce.

And Jessica is the principal designer and owner at JDuce Design but she also owns a business called Vacation Rental Designers. And so she's going to tell you all about her and her business in this episode which you are going to love because I know that so many of you creatives, just like me have wondered about this industry, have thought about it, have thought about designing for other people. And investors have thought about maybe investing in a property of your own.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

And so we get into all of those things today and we talk about if you want to learn more about this, why you want to come to this summit which I'm calling a conference within a conference. So I'm going to be speaking at the summit because I'm venturing into this area. And I'm not speaking as a seasoned I've been there and done all the things and made all mistakes. I'm speaking about how I'm building a hospitality brand, a sister brand to my Tobi Fairley brand with my mom and all the things we're doing.

And the properties we're starting with and the way we're going to monetize them and all this fun stuff and what it's like to really build this hospitality brand from really the mindset of – I mean it's almost like a boutique hotel but not. And so that's going to be super fun and I'm going to speak about that at the conference. But today Jessica and I talk just about this whole industry and this category of design and if it's a good one to get in and why it's a good one and why it's still booming. And all the things you've thought about and wondered about, everything.

So get ready to enjoy this awesome conversation with Jessica. I could talk about this with her forever. I know we're going to be long term friends. We're just getting to know each other but there's so much. We could hardly stop talking on the episode and then after the episode was over we talked some more. And before it started we talked some more but it's a really exciting place to be at High Point. And it's a really exciting category to be in which Jessica got in, in 2017 kind of by accident as she tells us.

But she's done amazing things there in the vacation rental industry, the short term rental industry. And now she's an accomplished speaker and presenter and has been on podcasts and panels and trade shows and all the things really talking about this work. She's been published in Business of Home, Furniture Today, Designers Today, the KBIS Magazine. If it's an industry go to mag she has probably talked about this content and being a designer and even being a designer in this category there.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

But today you're going to hear just the fun real life easygoing person that she is and learn a whole lot from her. So I'm going to be quiet, even though I'm still excited and I'm going to let you hear the episode which you're going to love. And I'll see you at the end of the episode and I'll remind you where you can sign up. And as you'll hear in the episode if you listen to this right when it comes out or within a few days of that you can still take advantage of some special discounts, not only their early bird rate but an extra special rate that's just for people listening to this podcast which is so fun.

Okay, so here I go, I'm being quiet, I promise. Can you tell I talk about stuff a lot when I'm excited? Okay, enjoy the episode.

Tobi: Hey, Jessica, welcome to The Design You Podcast. I'm really excited you're here today.

Jessica: I am so excited, Tobi. Thank you so much.

Tobi: Going to be fun, okay. So this is a topic that has been I would say near and dear to your heart for a while and you're going to tell us in just a second how long when you tell us who you are and what you do. And it's newly becoming near and dear to my heart which is a whole other story and we'll talk about that too. But before we talk about me let's talk about you. Tell everybody who may not have encountered you and your business and all the fabulous things you do, a little bit about all of that.

Jessica: Okay. Alright, I'm jumping in. My name is Jessica Duce. And I own JDuce Design and I'm the co-owner of Vacation Rental Designers. And I stumbled into this niche. About seven years ago I was asked to pick flooring at a beach home and 11 steps to the sand kind of beach house. It was so yummy. And it was the first vacation rental I'd ever gone to and they had bought it furnished. And as I'm looking around I'm thinking, you need to spend the money on the furnishings, not the floor. And it wasn't cute in any way.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Tobi: No one wants to stay here.

Jessica: It was like a sad Wyoming ranch on the Oregon coast which is interesting. And that owner took a leap of faith with me and I figured it out, did a day with housekeeping, learned I'm not a housekeeper but I learned what they go through and took it from there. And I haven't turned back and not only did I start that project which that owner's property manager said, "Why are you hiring a designer? People just want to come and rent your place, you don't need to spend the money, you already have rental income."

And the owner took the leap of faith, we redid it. He doubled his rates and it had a waiting list and the property owner just said, "You're onto something." And I did seven more homes along the coast for the same company.

Tobi: So fun. Okay, so seven years ago people were barely knowing what this even was, that it was a niche. And most of us, really the niche is short term rentals, sometimes they're mid-term or a little bit longer rentals but basically short term rentals is what we're typically talking about here. But people did start to know things like Airbnb or Vrbo because they were renting their own vacation properties for their summer trip to Florida from Arkansas or whatever. And so they're like, "Ah, I've heard of that."

And then we started seeing of course all the commercials and things over the years. So now I think the world is pretty versed in the Airbnb concept. In fact I had to train myself to call it short term rentals because it's like Kleenex and tissues, everybody calls them Airbnbs. But I think it's been so interesting to watch the last few years especially through the pandemic. I was watching this industry really closely because it (a) is related to design, (b) I had several people that I consult with in our coaching programs that had done a property or two or were building in this niche.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

And so it's been really fun to watch and now I'm finally getting into it but what actually finally convinced me that this would be fun is kind of hearing where the industry is today. Which what I'm learning and have been learning for the last little while is that the properties that do the best are kind of what you just talked about and more. It's really about the hospitality piece. It's about the brand. It's kind of a boutique hotel that's not a hotel. It's your own little space to stay.

And I also see lots of interior designers still very interested in one of the many ways they can get into this niche which could be to design for other people like you're doing. Some of the designers I talk to and that I see doing amazing things are investing in a property or two themselves and making it all about their own brand. So let's talk about that. What are the options for working in this kind of industry? Is it only those couple, you could be an owner/designer or just a designer for other people?

And kind of start to take us through why we might want to be in this niche. What's great about this niche? You were telling me before we started recording some of the really cool things about this niche that is different than, I call it sometimes niche, sometimes niche, that are different than just a residential project. So just kind of let us inside your brain and tell us what you think about that stuff.

Jessica: It's a scary place but here we go. I'm passionate about this. I still do residential design but I guess the big takeaway for what is different about this niche and I hesitate to even say niche, we are a full-fledged category, a fast growing 'category' there is, they say.

Tobi: In design, yeah, in design, okay, good.

Jessica: And so we have our residential clients. We target residential people, different income levels. And you kind of, you have a little broader scope for targeting your potential clients in short term rental design

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

because you can target private owners. You can be your own owner like you just said. You can target property managers. You can target investors. You can target real estate agents who are now specializing in this. So what your base is for potential work is a little more vast than residential.

And like we were talking before we started, one of my favorite explanations for this niche is it's similar to when staging started and real estate agents would say, "Why would I hire a stager? I know what to do." And now here we are so many years later and if you don't have your property staged is your house even going to sell? That's the feeling out there. That's how important a stager has come to that industry. From where I started years ago where the property manager immediately assumed that I was not worth the money.

To now I'm finally getting to that point where people are recognizing how important a design is. In residential design you do your beautiful project. You do the reveal. Everybody's happy, hopefully somebody cries, they get with their friends, you post it on your social and then you wait in case they need you again or they refer you. But in short term rental design, we do our job, they love the project and then they share it on their social media and they're sharing it on all these platforms for people to rent because we want people to see these beautiful photos.

And then every guest that comes they are like, "Oh my gosh, look where I'm staying. Look at this Instagram moment for me." And they're sharing your work and it goes on from there. So you have multiple opportunities for people to share your work. That's one part. The second part is you've created a business model where it's replenishable because what we tell our investors and owners is you need to have a refresh every two to three years to keep your photos looking different, more attractive.

Tobi: Current, yeah.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Jessica: Yeah. We say it starts with the scroll and it's true. Guests are just scrolling, scrolling, and you want them to stop. And then anything that needs to be fixed, breaks, worn out, they're calling you to replace those items. So you have a business funnel that you get to maintain. How cool is that?

Tobi: Yeah. And like you were telling me before we started recording too, it's not just that the chair breaks. It's also that you wash the sheets and the towels and the things a million times and those have to be replaced. And there's so many little details of really what we're talking about is this idea of a hospitality business, the wear and tear is different, the need is different. And if you're in the business of selling that product then you're needed potentially much more often than you would be of a home that's not getting that level of use, that level of wear, that level of needing to really be photographed so often.

I mean we want our clients' houses to be timeless as much as possible. And most of the time I would say my clients that are in the high end, they get tired of their stuff before it actually wears out. But maybe around seven to 10 years they're ready to do some things but it's not two years for sure usually if we've done the whole house. And it's not having that much wear like these properties would have, yeah.

Jessica: Yeah, I don't have as many high end clients as you do but the clients that do say, "Well, I want it to last forever." And I'm like, "Yeah." Because no, you'll be calling us [crosstalk].

Tobi: Right. And I always tell my clients on the residential side, "We're putting really good quality stuff in here, you'll get tired of it before it wears out. You'll want to redo something. And so maybe we'll recover some of these things." But that's the beauty of the short term rental business is that you are going to be doing that potentially more often, yeah, which is great.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

So there's one other way that I'm interested in the property. So my mom and I are getting into this as I've talked to you about.

We're starting with some little cottages that are near her home, probably about 40 minutes from me. And then we're going to go into some other areas in the state. But one of the things that we are going to do because I was already doing this separately for my business is create an ecommerce shop where we can also sell the product to people who stay there and they're like, "I love that chair so much, I want it in my own house." Or, "I loved those sheets so much I want to buy some for home."

So is that a new thing? Have you seen people do that? Is that normal? Kind of what's this, because I love this idea that there are other ways to monetize, even from people that maybe have never even stayed there yet but they just loved your website and loved the look and they're shopping in their stay, kind of before they've even stayed there potentially?

Jessica: I definitely when I first started to navigate this, this wasn't even on our brain but over the last three or four years this has really exploded. And not only is it designers or owners being really clever like you and having curated items that people can scan a QR code and buy. But to your point in a more luxury setting I know of some projects where when they book the project or book the property they receive a candle sent to them. It's the scent of the branded project.

Tobi: Yeah, we're doing that, we're making candle scents for – our cottages are the Rose Street Cottages and we're having different scents for each of our cottages which is so fun. I love that, yeah, isn't that so fun?

Jessica: Well, they're sending the little taste of that candle as a thank you for booking, and so they're already in love and then they're arriving at your booking and they're already excited about the experience. And now they're going to order a whole bunch of candles from you to keep them going.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

We're seeing a local artist having an opportunity to have their work in there. We're even seeing appliances. There's a new designer experience short-term rental in Austin. And I mean it really makes sense for the brands.

If you can have one house and maybe Monogram sends these designers there to experience their appliances and maybe Vanguard has sofas in there and those designers can experience Vanguard. But all these different brands have shared the cost responsibility of this vacation rental and you have a constant flow of people coming needing to check it.

Tobi: Absolutely, yeah, so fun. And that's one of the things I love about these little properties we're doing. So they're in a small town which from the research I've done I think we'll do well. A lot of what I hear is that some of these little bedroom communities and little places actually have some of the best returns or bookings because there's not anything else in those places to stay. So that'll be fun. But I also love that we can use it for retreats. I can use it for my company and bring my team in. I can have a lot of times I do things like paid masterminds with my programs.

So I can have people come in for an experience and stay there. So there's so many other things that my branding brain just goes crazy with. And like I said earlier, that's when I really got excited about this niche, not just to do the properties which is amazing already. But when I started thinking of building a brand around this and building the ecommerce and having the experience and building the social content and all of the visual kind of eye candy that's possible for these spaces. And then to create an experience for the people that stay there.

I mean I'm a good southern girl, I've always loved to entertain and to nurture people in my guestroom or over the holiday table or whatever. So that kind of stuff gets me really excited. So can we talk a little bit about that because everything I'm hearing, learning, researching, hearing on podcasts

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

is that the businesses that are doing the best are the ones that think like brands and think like hospitality brands.

Not just somebody who's kind of like your original client, I've got this space and I'll throw a leather sofa in there and people will for sure want to stay there, which is not at all what we're talking about when we talk about really this brand component.

Jessica: Yeah, I definitely see a much more sophisticated raise the bar level of design happening across the board of short term rental. But I also feel a responsibility to say that this branding model doesn't necessarily fit every single project. So for those designers that are interested in getting into this you don't stress yourself out of creating this perfectly branded experience right out of the gate because there's different levels. But on the other side of that I also say, I think that when you talk about the branding and the experience, yes I agree.

But I think that guests almost want a type of a voyeuristic experience with your cottages. Yes, they'll be beautiful, I'm definitely going to be a guest at one. They'll be next level. But we also kind of want to go to these homes and when we say experience, it's such a broad word. It's like, Tobi likes this. Look at the sheets Tobi, uses here. I really like these. And that goes down to the homes that I've done. I think people want that kind of experience that they're in this personal home and they have this inside view of what's going on and it's beautiful and curated.

Tobi: Yeah, I love that you said that because I agree. All short term rentals are not this concept necessarily. This is definitely appealing to somebody like me who's a creative and who's a designer. I see so many of these little – well, I wouldn't so many. I see more than a handful of these little properties pop up around Instagram. I just discovered one yesterday actually kind of accidentally. I was following an influencer I like that sells

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

clothing and stuff or just has a LikeToKnowIt shop where she gets commissions for influencing.

And I was on her LikeToKnowIt shop or her Instagram feed and she was talking about back in December she and some girlfriends got away to this little property in Birmingham that a designer owns. And it was so beautiful, I mean beautifully done. I'm like, "I want to stay there. I want to go there." She described the experience. She linked to all these little restaurants nearby. And I mean this place was really designed, I mean a collection of flow blue on the walls and antiques and art and all the things.

And that, it was just kind of like you're saying, I don't know, eye candy feast for all the senses to be there. And it made me really want to – it kind of does everything that a luxury hotel does but with the space of a home. You could cook there. You could bring a personal chef in. There's so many cool things you can do. And yes, that doesn't have to be every short term rental experience. It can totally be a great revenue stream if you're just helping people uplevel what they have so that they can make more money or get more bookings.

It's just like anything else, now, you set a designer like us loose on this stuff and our brains go crazy and we want to do like you, I can see the creative in me is like, "Absolutely the signature scent and all the things." But when we started this conversation one of the reasons that we're talking about this is because you have been instrumental in developing a new what I call conference within a conference or event within an event which is this short term rental summit that's happening in probably, what is that, six weeks or eight weeks or something from the time we're recording?

And this is going to come out pretty quickly after we record it. But in High Point, during High Point Market, at High Point Market is a little subset of High Point Market because this niche is so big and this category is so big. And so many people want to do it better and know the vendors that will

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

work with them and collaborate with other creatives and share stories and mastermind about it. And I'm going to come do a talk about this hospitality brand I'm building which is fun.

But one of the things I loved is you told me that the reason that you wanted to do this is because you really want to level up this category or niche, whatever you call it. And kind of like you said with staging, when staging first came around, people didn't really know what it is. Now it's so important and people get it and see the return on it. So talk to me about that a little bit. Talk to me about what that even means to level up this category.

And then I know you have some ideas around as a designer of short term rentals or even an owner designer of short term rentals, there's some other things we want to think about, not just the pretty, pretty place. But being a responsible kind of part of this, what would you call that, supply chain or a category of creating places for people to stay, there's a lot of other things to think about. So can we talk about those two things first, what leveling up means and then what is our responsibility beyond just to the property or the owner when we're doing this work?

Jessica: Well, when I say level up and what I mean by that is when I first started again, the idea of design in a short term rental for many people was everything I hate in the basement goes in. You just wait for it to wear out and then you find some other crap.

Tobi: Yes. And I've stayed in a few of those places in Florida and was not happy as a designer. It was really, it put a damper on my vacation because that was not fun. I didn't want that in my own house, I didn't want that in my own basement. And I sure didn't want it to be my vacation experience.

Jessica: And I still have to have these what I call educational meetings with prospective owners, clients because Airbnb and Vrbo isn't the cheapest option. Maybe at some places but typically now they're pretty competitive

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

across the board. And I'll have owners that still have that mindset of get this crappy stuff in here because they're just going to wear it out. And I'm like, "You're asking them to pay what is equivalent to this five star resort or four star retreat down the street. Why do you think that they have to live subpar what you would expect and yet you're encouraging them to stay here?"

Tobi: Right, because certainly a Four Seasons or a Ritz is not putting the crappy stuff in the basement but neither even is the Western or a really good Holiday Inn. They're still not putting the worst cheapest stuff. And like you said, if you're in a similar price point per night people expect to have a similar experience especially if you're in the higher end price per stay. And there are some of these properties that go for a lot of money for a night.

Jessica: I think part of what I consider my responsibility is before I meet with somebody I check what is in the area of that property and what things are renting for and how many heads in beds you're going to have. And I think that we have to educate on that, typically – well, not typically, a lot of times you may have a new owner in this field and they're looking at, I just spent all this money, I bought this, I have to buy all this stuff. Where can I cut corners?

And this is where the option of high low design really helps you. But when I say level up that's what I'm saying is that educate your owners, your property managers or whatever about the value of what you're doing and your price point compared to what's comparable. And then little things and these are the things we'll talk about at the summit. I see this a lot. I'll see a property that they've kind of done the bare minimum but let's say it sleeps six. And then there'll be a table for two in the kitchen. And then there's place settings for four but it sleeps six.

And they have a whole bunch of silverware and none of it matches but you've got to wash your plate because somebody else is going to need it because you didn't...

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Tobi: Oh my gosh.

Jessica: No, just some things, I know that sounds really basic but there is a lot of owner education that needs to happen with that. And also when I say level up is I think sometimes people are intimidated when they're getting into this category to have these conversations like remote locking. And the things that you're supposed to post in the area. I've seen some properties, there are requirements. You're supposed to have a fire safety plan posted somewhere. And you want to make sure you have plenty of area in the entryway so you have allowed for luggage and not too much chackies.

And by educating the owners on how to make these decisions with more of a guest experience in mind on top of being curated, I'm going to just keep using that word because that's what I mean by level up. When you have the lingo and you're explaining why you're making the decisions you're making, that makes them trust you more, see you as a valuable resource, what am I trying to say?

Tobi: Like an advocate.

Jessica: An expert.

Tobi: Yeah, an expert, an advocate, all of those things, yeah.

Jessica: And then that helps us level up across the board and then everybody can charge more.

Tobi: Yeah, it's so good. Well, so at the short term rental conference, are people going to learn some of these things and tools and even words that you're talking about or do we learn that, do people go learn that somewhere else? I've been studying things and taking a course or two and listening to podcasts. But what can people expect when they're like how many people it sleeps, heads in beds, all that stuff, how do people start to

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

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

become an expert or at least informed enough to be an advocate to the person they're working for?

Because you've learned a lot through experience obviously but talk to us about, is that the point of the conference, will we get up to speed at the conference of all those things? Is it for beginners? Is it for everybody?

Jessica: Honestly, we're trying to create this so that no matter what level you are, you're going to leave with some amazing information. We are bringing in some designers and owners in this field that have done really cool things. I cannot wait to hear them talk. Beautiful projects that they have navigated and are building these huge businesses with, we're going to see all levels. We're going to have talks about products and vendor friendly like we talked about.

So we're also going to talk about branding, marketing, like what you and I just talked about a minute ago with how to get those products in there and how we're going to sell it. But to your point, having some of this lingo and I know this is a crazy kind of a silly reference but have you ever used the term when you just need a client to be kind of rest your brain and be quiet and let you do your thing? And they give you all their opinions and you're like, "Sometimes your eye needs a place to rest when you talk." And then they're like, "She knows what she's talking about."

So I want you to have all those tools in your back pocket like heads in beds, [crosstalk], and all these little just enough to be dangerous too. And I promise you, those owners and property managers will be like, "Okay, she's an expert." So we really will try to cover as much as we can. I mean I can't believe how much we're packing in. I'm really excited about it. I want people to leave excited and inspired and ready to tackle this and make money, that's the goal.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Tobi: Yeah, so good. I think isn't one of our common friends and somebody who's worked with me in my programs, Linda Holt is going to be there too, to teach us how to photograph our properties and to stop the scroll in a better way. So even that part, even how to photograph or put things on with photo I guess, or maybe video or whatever to put things on social.

Jessica: Linda and I are collaborating on our project. And so we're going to talk about that as well is with design and style tips and with her amazing photography skill with the iPhone. But yeah, she is actually working, research right now and on just how to photograph an Airbnb or Vrbo or short-term or whatever, the cleanest just for this panel. Because it's not real estate photography. It's very specific. And as you scroll through and you'll see somebody with a picture of their coffee pots in their listing. Your guests don't care about your freaking coffee pots.

They do want a beautiful panoramic so that they can visualize them drinking coffee in your beautiful space.

Tobi: Yeah. So that's so interesting and that's what's so beautiful about this conference because where we might just think about how the client lives in a home and then how we photograph it for a magazine to get more jobs. You're wanting people to spend their money and so they have to envision themselves in the space. And basically create the experience before they even get to the experience so that they'll click reserve or book or whatever the button says on the site, yeah, so good.

Okay, so I think we've covered a lot. There was one thing that you did say earlier to me before we started recording that I did think was so amazing. And you touched on it but I just kind of wanted to circle back briefly. This idea of even Rent Responsibly which I think you said is an organization but even having that mindset.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Because I asked you when you said that earlier, I was like, “Who are we being responsible to, is it the community and the neighborhood by not having 12 people’s cars parked out front in this rental? Or is it to the user or is it to the owner or is it to the climate with the products we pick, who are we responsible to?”

And you said kind of all of those but can you just touch on that a bit more just so that when people are getting into this headspace and realizing this is really different than residential for a number of reasons. Because we’re even thinking about what it does to a neighborhood when next door suddenly 12 people are sleeping or eight people are sleeping in this property and where are they all going to be? And are they going to be playing loud music and are they going to have a party and where are their cars going to go?

How do we start to think differently and get into that either hospitality or hotel or owner headspace a little bit better when it comes to responsibility?

Jessica: There is an organization called Rent Responsibly and they’re actually going to be at the conference. And they’re going to have a really informative panel about this. So I am going to touch on it enough to sound dangerous. But again this is part of our education and how we can encourage owners to help us guide them to responsible decisions. And one of the first things that I had to learn was I did a project and it was on a septic tank system. So I actually had to source differently because of the way they had to wash the items for the rental.

And so that came to how I became more aware with green products to use. And being on the sustainable side of what you’re doing, I like to repurpose a lot of things. I don’t want to keep adding to the landfills. I will not work with Ikea stuff on projects. I think that’s not very – I’m sorry to sound preachy and I don’t want to offend anybody but I think Ikea isn’t good.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Tobi: Not aligned with your values for sure.

Jessica: Yeah. And so things like that for sustainable choices. Then you touched on the fact that if an owner says, "Okay, how many people can we cram into this place?" If this is a small property and I'm saying this because this happened to me. It was a residential neighborhood and they wanted to maximize their dollars and they wanted 12 to be able to sleep in this tiny house that really should be pushing it at six. And I just honestly shared with them that I didn't feel comfortable with that.

You're having 12 people in this home, it's not safe. That's going to put at least three to five cars let's just say in this community. You're going to make your neighbors angry. We want to do the best finishes we can and attract your four to six guests at a higher dollar rate. And it took a lot of back and forth but you know what, they finally did that and they're so glad they did. And I know their neighbors do too. So sometimes you have to spend the dollars and that's part of that level up and education.

Tobi: Yeah, because we're seeing a lot of communities have some very strict legislation come in about how many short term rentals you can even have in their city limits or in their county or in their area. And certain neighborhoods that you can't have them in and I would appreciate that as a homeowner for sure that there's not a party pad going across the street. So I love this thinking about how do I be a good neighbor as an owner of a rental property. I love that and that very much would be in alignment with my values too.

My mom's the next door neighbor of the properties we're starting with so I guess she's going to be a perfect voice on that because as we're building these right across from her house she's going to be thinking about who do I want in that space? And what kind of neighbor do I want right across the street from where we live? So it's such a great point.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

And I think to your point earlier a lot of people even if they're seasoned interior designers we have this weird thing we do as humans of when we're new at something we don't always trust our gut instincts. Or we don't always voice our concerns and we're like, "Well, I don't want to offend the owner or I don't want to lose the job or I don't want to act like I know what I'm talking about." But I love that you're bringing this up because it sounds to me like we need to remember just our own personal values and how to be a good neighbor and what makes sense logically.

And be careful to put profits before people because I think that's where in general when we put profits before people in any part of our business it usually doesn't end very well for all of those involved, right?

Jessica: Well, I saw this happen. I did a short term rental in Newport, Oregon and the area was booming. And everybody was buying up everything they could. And all of a sudden the people that lived there didn't really have an affordable place to live [crosstalk]. And so the city group there, the town, it's a small town, they passed a no more short term rentals, period. And then they were deciding which ones would be grandfathered. So overnight the whole area changed.

And that really made an effect on me because hotels, they pay lots of big taxes and they have all these rules and responsibilities. But then anybody was coming in, buying a house, putting as many people in there as they could and they affected the entire community. So this again goes to that level up with this education and I tell people that. They're paying all these taxes. It's just a matter of time before this starts happening, [crosstalk].

And you don't have to rent your house every day of the year, you just have to make a number. So you have to decide how much you're going to invest and what your rental is going to be to make that number.

Tobi: Yes, agree.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Jessica: That could be 200 days, or 100 or 300.

Tobi: Yeah, and I love, that was one of the things that was so interesting when I started studying this business is that I guess automatically you just assume you want to be rented more often than not but that's not always the case. And a lot of the things I was listening to were saying, a 50% or 60% occupancy in a month is amazing because it's not wearing out, I mean if you're priced right, because it's not getting as much wear and tear and there's so many things to think about.

So I love that you have brought this concept and this summit to market where there's already going to be a lot of people there interested in this. And what a beautiful service to those of us who do want to dip into or jump in, in a major way into this category. I think one last question I'd love to hear your thoughts on and I'm sure there's so many different schools of thought.

But I think a lot of us that have started paying attention to this category have heard that early on and especially during, right before the pandemic or even the early part of the pandemic before everything kind of fell apart. That so many people were getting into this category and people that really just weren't even owners were renting and subletting apartments and doing all of these kind of crazy things just to get a piece of the pie. And then the pandemic hit and we know that shut down a lot of travel for a while.

And then so where is the industry now? Because I hear some parts of it are sort of falling by the wayside. And then the people that are doing a lot of the things you've talked about today and I've talked about, they're doing it well, are kind of rising to the top but you said it was the fastest growing category. Do you think it's going to keep growing? Should we be nervous that we're late to the party? Did the bubble burst? What's the state of the industry as far as people still getting into it at this point?

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Jessica: I think it is going to explode even more. Surprisingly a lot of big businesses and vendors and manufacturers that you and I would both know the names of, like we see at High Point in Dallas and Vegas. They are just now realizing the importance and the value of this category. So you're going to see within the next year or two more and more companies that have a specific category for this as opposed to you scroll and you see residential, commercial, hospitality.

I think you're going to see an added little spot there because of how much we're seeing this industry explode. They've already surpassed all their numbers. I stay in touch with all the national conferences. Nobody is seeing actually a slowdown in the number of people booking. That's the big thing. Bookings are increasing. But I do think there is a type of adjustment happening which was needed. I think legislation does need to come in and help but your guests, no, we're only seeing more bookings.

And we're seeing people that either get on the ball and improve their property or their marketing and branding and message or they're not going to make it and somebody else is going to come in and do it.

Tobi: Yeah, that's such a great point. So the desire from the consumer is as big as it's ever been. And that's what's going to keep growing. It's just like with any other business, especially businesses that don't have huge barriers to entry because you can do these obviously some way cheaper than others. So a lot of people could get into the business. So what's happening you're saying is the onus is on that owner or that investor to see what they're willing to do, just like with any other business.

Are you going to market? Are you going to brand? Are you going to create an experience? Are you going to do all these things we've talked about? Or are you going to do the minimum viable and think that your business is going to explode which it's not going to. Yeah, we get out what we put in.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Jessica: Exactly.

Tobi: That's so good. I love that explanation, thank you for that. Because I do think that when we hear snippets and parts of what's happening in the economy, that's what confuses us. And so I love knowing that the demand has not slowed, in fact it's growing. It's just we're seeing those people fall by the wayside that weren't doing what was required of them to really be a successful player in this category.

Jessica: Right. And that's good, those adjustments are good.

Tobi: Yeah, totally, yeah, and we'll always see that. We'll see that in residential design. We'll see that in any kind of business. That there's always going to be a lot of businesses that fail compared to the numbers that do really well. And it's not always this but a lot of times it is what you're willing to put into it, time, energy, money, all the things, yeah, so good. Alright, so tell everybody who we've now hooked that want to come to this conference, is it just for interior designers, it has to be someone that could go – or designers and vendors? Who can come?

Do you have to go to the regular High Point Market as well? When is it? What are the things?

Jessica: Well, I know I'm biased but it really is going to be fabulous. It starts on the Wednesday evening before market which is the 19th and we are having a cocktail mixer at Pandora's Manor and I love Pandora's Manor.

Tobi: Fun, I designed one of those rooms in there a long time ago when we did that, that was fun.

Jessica: Yeah, stunning. Stunning. And anybody that's ever been there knows they want to go back. So if you've never been there, you're going to absolutely love it. So that's kicking off Wednesday evening and then we

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

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

have education all day on the 20th, Thursday. And then Friday is education half of the day and we're feeding you and we're loving on you and it's going to be fabulous. And then Friday afternoon is tours of vendor specific showrooms for this category. And then on Saturday market kicks off.

Well, we're very proud to say that High Point Market Authority has partnered with us on this summit. So for those of you that are ready to register you're going to register through the link that takes you to High Point Market so you can choose whether you just do the summit or you do both. But the vetting process is the same. So whatever is required for you to attend market is the same for [crosstalk].

Tobi: Tax ID, business card, all the stuff that would normally be required to come to market, yeah.

Jessica: Exactly. Because we've also had some people voice concern like is "Joe Blog off the street going to walk in on this summit?" No, everybody's fully vetted. The price will go up. We have early bird registration right now that ends, I believe on February 28th. So if you're going to register, I'd go now.

Tobi: Okay, let me see, I think our podcast, just let me make sure that this – I'm pretty sure this podcast comes out before. It's going to come out as we're recording this, let me see. Yeah, we're going to come out on the 23rd. So when people hear this you're going to run to register because you're going to have five days once this podcast episode comes out, to still grab that early bird registration.

Jessica: Well, I have a special discount code that I'm allowed to offer on your podcast, and it's an additional 10% because you're special. We only offer this with a couple of spots. So the coupon code or discount code is IDS, all capitals, 2023, and all capitals VRDS.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

Tobi: IDS2023 and then what's the rest?

Jessica: VRDS.

Tobi: VRDS, okay, and everybody listening, don't worry, we'll put it in the show notes of the podcast. We're going to put the link of this stuff. We're going to be talking about this episode on our social. So we'll link you all back to all the good details. But if you're listening you get that extra little perk for registering which is great. And does that 10% come off whether it's the early bird or whenever they listen can they still use that or is that just in addition to the early bird?

Jessica: It's going to expire on the 28th as well.

Tobi: Okay, perfect, so you'll get the early bird price plus an additional, yeah, amazing. You're generous.

Jessica: Yes, we had a sponsor help us with that so we're very grateful, we want to share the love and we love that you are going to be a part of this. We are so excited.

Tobi: I'm very excited, it is so fun. Just having these new projects, not even just the cottages but just the idea of the brand and the learning and the entering into a new area is just putting so much life in me right now. It's just so fun. I love building businesses, I love trying new things. And where some people would be terrified it just is exhilarating to me. So I'm so happy to be a part of it. I've had the best time getting to know you already and I know we're going to get to know each other much better.

And Jane and the other people working with you, so much fun and so easy to work with so thank you for having me. And I'm just thrilled to be a part of it and to promote and share. And I know we're going to get a lot of response from this episode because there are a lot of people. I talk to so

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

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

many people including so many people I work with in my coaching programs that are just always on the cusp of this, jumping into this. They're like, "I've been thinking about that or I think I want to invest in one myself. Or I've been wondering or I've had a couple of requests."

And so there's so many people that have been hearing about it long enough kind of people that have wanted to do a course or other things like I've done. But I think this one seems even a little bit more accessible to them because it's not such a departure, not everybody's used to teaching. Everybody's already used to designing, that are in this design world and so they know they'll have to learn some things but it's not quite as scary to leap into this category. So I know that we're going to have a lot of response for sure from this episode.

Jessica: I was having designers asking me how I was doing it and so I started looking into it and this really is the first short term rental design, pure design focus summit. So it really is bringing a lot of value to this category.

Tobi: Yeah, so good, thank you so much. Okay everybody, we're going to put all of those details where you can find them for sure. And here's what I do want to say. If you listen to this after the early bird special, it still is worth the full price whatever the full price is because you are going to get...

Jessica: It'll never be this cheap again.

Tobi: Exactly, it'll never be this cheap again. Just jumping in and going ahead and getting started in this category will pay for itself, there's so many reasons. But if you're here early, grab those discounts, that's amazing. But please join us, it's going to be so fun. And you're going to have so many opportunities besides just learning to meet other people and network and network with vendors and there's just so much in this conference that I think you're going to love.

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

I'm already like, can I make sure and I think I am, I don't have any other obligations. But I want to be there for the whole thing. I want to be there for every speaker. I want to go to the showrooms. So I'm a student and a presenter at this event because I'm only presenting on the part of what I'm doing and how I'm thinking about hospitality. But there's so much, I'm going to bring two notepads and I'm a notetaker, I love to write all the things down. So I will come back with probably a book of information from this conference.

Jessica: I feel the same way. I'm presenting and I can't wait to learn, yeah.

Tobi: Yeah, amazing. Well, thank you for having this genius idea, and thank you for being here today and we'll have you back again. We've got to have you come back. Once we see what happens at the conference and what's next because I feel there's so much possibility for the work you're going to do with our industry in this category. So it's going to be fun to watch.

Jessica: We'll have so much to talk about.

Tobi: Awesome, okay, it's a date. We don't know when yet but you'll be back. And everybody, check out all the details and if they just want to go to the website, we haven't said the website. What's the website of the actual conference, do you remember? I don't remember. We can put it in the show notes.

Jessica: It's through HPXD.

Tobi: If they just Google short term rental.

Jessica: Vacation Rental Design Summit.

Tobi: Okay. Vacation Rental Design Summit, it will come up and we'll put all of those details everywhere. And if you follow me on Instagram which I

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

## Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce

think a lot of you do, just be watching our stories because we're going to be talking about it all this month, all of March and all of April, all the way right up until the 19th of April when we kick off.

Jessica: You're hooked now, you drank the Kool-Aid, you're in.

Tobi: I did, okay and there's no going back. So follow along. We'll keep you all posted and again, thank you so much, Jessica, it was fun. And I can't wait to see what's next.

Jessica: Me too, thanks.

Alright, so was that so much fun, are you excited? Are you ready to go? Were you already thinking about getting in this category or niche or industry or whatever you want to call it? Well, if you're thinking that, please run immediately and sign up for the inaugural Vacation Rental Design Summit starting Wednesday night April, I think it's 19th, whatever the Wednesday is, 2023 and running through Friday. I'll be there. Jessica will be there. A whole bunch of other cool fabulous people will be there.

And we cannot wait to see you and learn with you. And enjoy spending time and getting to know you at that summit, okay friends, all the details are in the show notes, they're in my social media. They are everywhere so just go look for it. Just go look around my Instagram, you'll find all the things you need to know and let us know. If you have questions DM me, DM Jessica. You can find her on Instagram too and we can't wait to hear from you. Alright, friends, 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

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

## **Ep #257: Upleveling the Vacation Rental Design Industry with Jessica Duce**

You coaching program today. You can get all the details at  
[TobiFairley.com](https://TobiFairley.com).