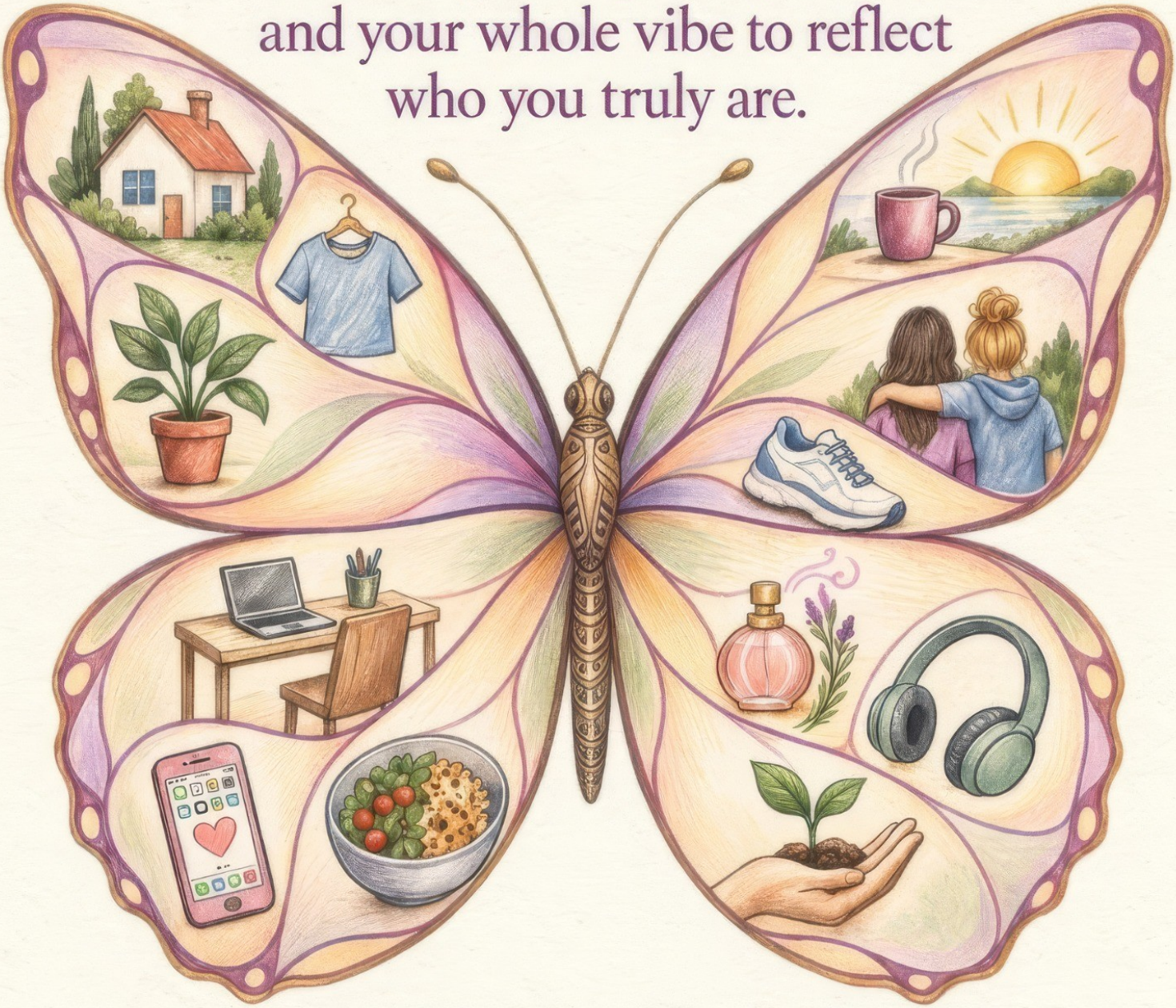
Authentically You

Transform your space, your style, and your whole vibe to reflect who you truly are.



Mia Bukow

Authentically You

Transform your space, your style, and your whole vibe
to reflect who you truly are.

by Mia Bukow

Dedication

For everyone who looked around their room and thought, "This doesn't feel like me." It's about to.

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Introduction: Before We Start

Hi. I'm Mia.

I've always been the person who notices a room. As a kid, I would move furniture because a corner bothered me, redo a shelf just to see if it felt better, and turn school projects into visual projects whenever I could. I didn't know words like neuroaesthetics. I just knew some spaces made me want to stay, think, or make things, and some didn't.

The noticing turned into something more useful the year I turned eight. My parents divorced that year. I did not know how to handle it. I was eight, nobody hands you instructions, and I did not have words for most of what I was feeling. I could not fix it, and I could not make it go away. What I had, at my mom's new place, was a storage closet under the stairs that nobody was using. I claimed it, turned it into my playroom, and poured everything into it. I decided what color I wanted to see first, where the desk went, and which of my drawings made the cut. I could not control what was happening to my family, but I could control that, and I held onto it. Fixing up that closet was the first time I understood that a space could make a hard stretch feel a little steadier. My family called it my Harry Potter room, and you will hear more about it in Chapter 11.

Middle school is where the other half of this book comes from. In seventh grade I came back to school in person after a long stretch of online classes, wearing a back brace for scoliosis. It was big, it was hard plastic, and it went everywhere I went. I spent most of that year trying to hide it. I wore oversized sweatshirts on purpose, kept my opinions small, and worked hard at looking like everyone else, because I was convinced that if anyone noticed the brace, it would be the only thing they saw. I wanted a new friend to learn my name before learning about my spine. Some of that year was rougher than belongs in a design book. What I can tell you is that blending in was exhausting, it never made me feel any safer, and it taught me something I still believe: wanting to be known for who you are is not the same thing as wanting attention.

Some parts of those years belong to people I love, and some are stories I may tell later, or may keep to myself. I get to decide that, and so do you. I keep coming back to that idea in this book, and I figured I should practice it.

When I stopped spending all my attention on fitting in, I finally had some left over for figuring out what I liked. I liked color and light. I liked objects with a story behind them, a desk I could focus at, and clothes I didn't have to adjust all day.

As I got older, I started asking why. Why can one room make homework feel easier while another makes your brain feel loud? Why can an outfit change the way you carry yourself? I started testing little changes, paying attention to what happened, and then reading everything I could find about the questions that kept coming up.

I'm 17. This book isn't coming from a huge portfolio or a client list, and I don't want to pretend it is. It comes from experimenting with my own spaces and projects, helping friends

and family, spending time behind the scenes in an interior design office, and spending a lot of time researching how environments can affect the way we feel and function.

That's where this book came from.

If you are having a hard year right now, I want you to know something I didn't know in seventh grade: you can start with your room.

I'm not going to tell you the correct shade of white for your walls or which throw pillows you need. There are a million places online for that. I care more about the question underneath all of it: what feels like you? Not what keeps showing up on TikTok, not what your parents would choose, and not what looks right in somebody else's room. Once you know that, your room, clothes, desk, and even little daily routines get easier to make your own.

I don't think your surroundings are something you have to earn after you've figured out your life. You can use what you have right now to make everyday life feel more supportive, more personal, and more yours.

A room can't build your life for you. It can't get you into college, fix a bad day, or magically make you confident. But it can make it easier to focus, rest, create, get ready, have a friend over, or just feel comfortable being yourself.

It's kind of weird how specific we can be about a playlist and how little thought we give the room where we listen to it. We know exactly which song belongs on a getting-ready playlist, but we can live with the same wall, light, or chair for years and never ask whether we even like it. That made me wonder what would happen if we paid a little more attention to the physical world around us.

I started going down research rabbit holes. I read studies, books, and articles about environmental psychology, neuroaesthetics, color, light, clutter, nature, sensory needs, identity, and clothing. Then I tried ideas in my own room and helped friends and family think through theirs. Some things worked, some didn't, and some surprised me. This book is what I wish I'd had when I first started trying to connect all of that.

My business is called Room2Flourish, and the name means two things.

The first is the obvious one: a room you can flourish in. That means a space set up for the person who lives in it, so it helps you sleep, focus, make things, and have people over instead of working against you all day.

The second meaning is making room. You are probably carrying something around. It might be a rough year, a friendship that ended badly, the person you had to be to get through middle school, or somebody's opinion about what you are allowed to like. Cleaning your desk won't erase any of that. But the more of it you stop hauling everywhere, the more room you get. You get room in your head, room in your day, and room in your life for things that are new and yours. The question is what you do with the room that opens up. My answer is to fill it with you, with your own colors, objects, and ideas.

Part One is about noticing what your surroundings are already doing. Part Two introduces the 12 Design Archetypes, the framework I created to make design identity easier to

understand. Part Three takes that idea into twelve parts of daily life. Part Four is about starting before you have a perfect room or a perfect budget.

If you are in a hurry because you are moving into a dorm or an apartment with friends soon, read Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 11 first. Chapters 7 and 8 help you figure out your design identity before you buy anything, so your first shopping trip is not just a copy of somebody's dorm checklist. Chapter 9 tells the story of Priya and Alex, two roommates with very different styles who have to make one apartment work for both of them. Chapter 11 is about the room you are moving into, including dorms and rentals where you cannot paint the walls. Then come back and read the rest once you have unpacked.

A giant budget or perfect space isn't required.

You do need to pay attention to what feels like you and what doesn't.

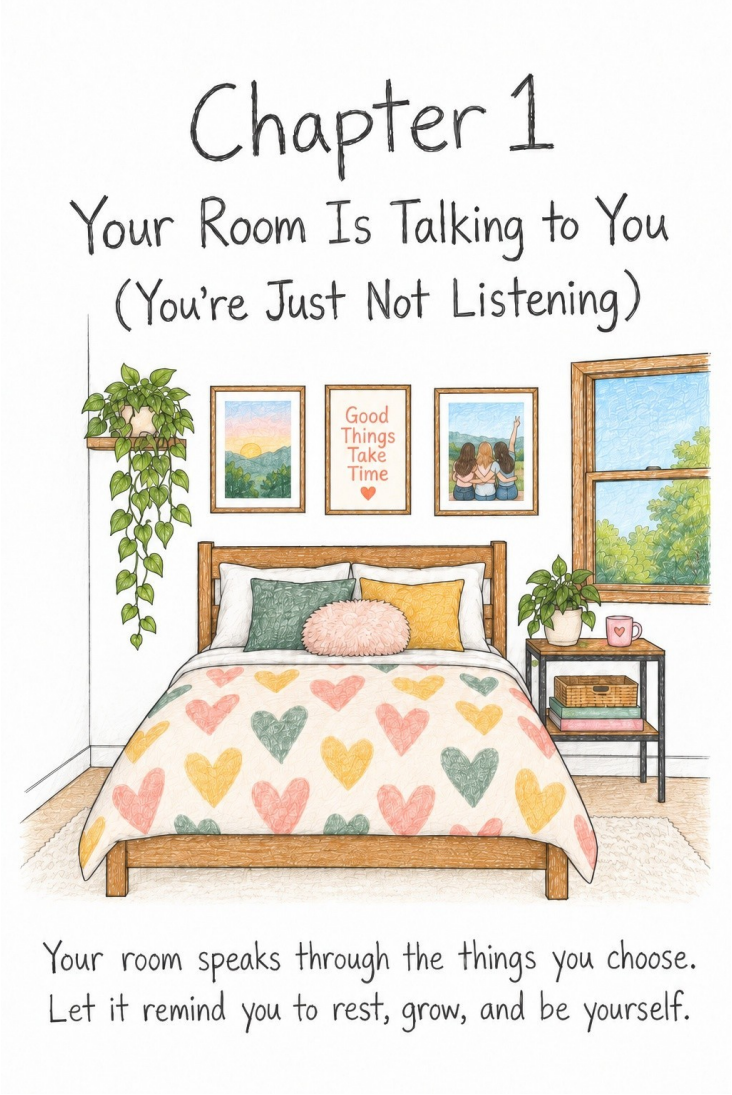
Let's figure that out.

Mia

PART ONE

The Wake Up

Why Everything Around You Matters More Than You Think



"Your room doesn't have to look perfect. It should feel good to live in."

Right now, wherever you're reading this, look up. Look around. What do you see?

Maybe it's a bedroom with clothes on the floor and a poster you stopped liking two years ago. Maybe it's a dorm room where half the furniture was chosen by the school. Maybe it's a first apartment you share with roommates, or just the same bedroom you've had since middle school. Maybe your desk is three feet from your bed and currently buried under chargers, water bottles, and homework.

Now ask yourself: does this space feel like me?

If you hesitated, that's your answer.

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One reason spaces matter is simple: your brain is constantly taking in what is around you, even when you're not deliberately thinking about it. Light, noise, clutter, color, temperature, texture, and where things are placed all become part of the experience of being in a room.

I started reading about this because I wanted to know whether "this room feels better" was just personal taste. The answer is more interesting than that. Researchers in fields like environmental psychology and neuroaesthetics study how surroundings interact with attention, emotion, memory, stress, and behavior.

A messy desk does not automatically cause stress, and painting a wall blue will not fix your mood. People and environments are more complicated than that. Research does suggest that features of our surroundings can make it easier or harder to focus, settle down, restore our attention, or feel comfortable in a space.

I see this in myself. When my room gets chaotic, I feel more scattered. When I fix the lighting, clear enough space to work, or move something that has been bothering me, I usually feel the difference. Friends have described the same thing. The room isn't the whole problem, but sometimes it is one piece of it.

Changing a room won't solve everything. Sometimes it just removes one layer of friction. That still counts.

• • •

You Didn't Choose This. That's the Problem.

A lot of us live in spaces we didn't really choose. Your parents picked the furniture. You inherited a sibling's desk. Your dorm came with a bed, a dresser, and lighting that seems personally offended by happiness. You grabbed whatever was affordable because you needed something, and whether it felt like you never came up.

And then we get used to it. We stop asking a pretty basic question: what would make this space work better for me?

Meanwhile, we're incredibly specific about other things. We curate playlists down to the mood. We choose profile pictures carefully. We can spend forever getting one tiny online detail right. But the physical space where we sleep, study, get dressed, and recover from the day? A lot of the time we just accept whatever is there.

You would never let someone else choose every song you listen to. Your room deserves at least some of that same attention.

You also don't have to spend a fortune. Moving a lamp, clearing one surface, changing what you see from bed, putting something meaningful where you'll see it, or getting rid of something you secretly hate can matter. This is not about making the room expensive. It is about figuring out what helps and what gets in your way.

• • •

The Science of Why This Matters

I'm not going to turn this into a textbook, but the research is worth knowing because it changed how I thought about design.

The research is not as simple as "blue makes everyone calm" or "clutter makes everyone stressed." People respond differently, and context matters. But I kept seeing the same basic idea across the research: daylight, noise, visual clutter, nature, color, and sensory load can all affect how comfortable, distracted, restored, alert, or overwhelmed we feel in a space.

Clothing can matter too. You may see the term enclothed cognition, which researchers use when studying how what we wear can affect thoughts, attention, or behavior. One early lab-coat study became famous, but no single study proves that an outfit transforms your brain. What I take from the research is much simpler: what you wear can change how you see yourself in a moment, and that can affect how you act or feel.

That is why I think design deserves more respect than "making things pretty." Your surroundings are part of your day, and they do a lot more than decorate it.

If you're trying to study in the same sweatpants you've been wearing since yesterday, your phone is flashing every thirty seconds, there are three empty cups on the desk, and the overhead light makes everything look like a hospital waiting room, you can probably still get the assignment done. I've definitely done it.

"I can technically function here" is a pretty low bar.

I'd rather make the space help a little.

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Design Is Already Happening to You

Once I started noticing design, I saw it everywhere.

Stores choose lighting, music, displays, and even where you walk for a reason. Restaurants think about sound, seating, color, and how long they want people to stay. Apps are designed to hold your attention. There are entire teams whose job is to think about how spaces and interfaces affect what we do.

I notice it in waiting rooms too. I have sat in a lot of them, and the ones with real daylight, a few plants, and art that somebody chose on purpose feel nothing like the ones with a buzzing light and a stack of old magazines, even when the wait is exactly as long. Somebody designed both of those rooms. Only one of them was designed with the person in the chair in mind.

Your own room is one of the few places where you get to use those choices for yourself. Even if you can't paint the walls or buy new furniture, you still have more control than you probably think.

So why not use some of it?

Forget the perfect aesthetic. Make the space work better for the person who lives there.

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The Three Things Your Space Is Telling You Right Now

Try this. Look around the room you're in and answer three questions:

One: Is there anything here that makes me genuinely happy when I see it? Something I picked because I love it, not because it was cheap, trendy, or already there?

Two: Is there anything that belongs to an older version of me? An old poster, a gift I keep out of guilt, clothes I don't wear, something from a phase that ended a while ago?

Three: If I came into this room after a terrible day, would it help me feel better or make everything feel louder?

If one of those answers makes you pause, good. That's information. Redoing the whole room can wait. You've already found one place worth paying attention to.

I've seen small versions of this in my own room and when helping people I know. Moving furniture does not create a new life. But a space that works better can make it easier to study, sleep, get ready, make something, invite a friend over, or calm down after a long day. Those small things add up because you live with them every day.

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So What Do We Do About It?

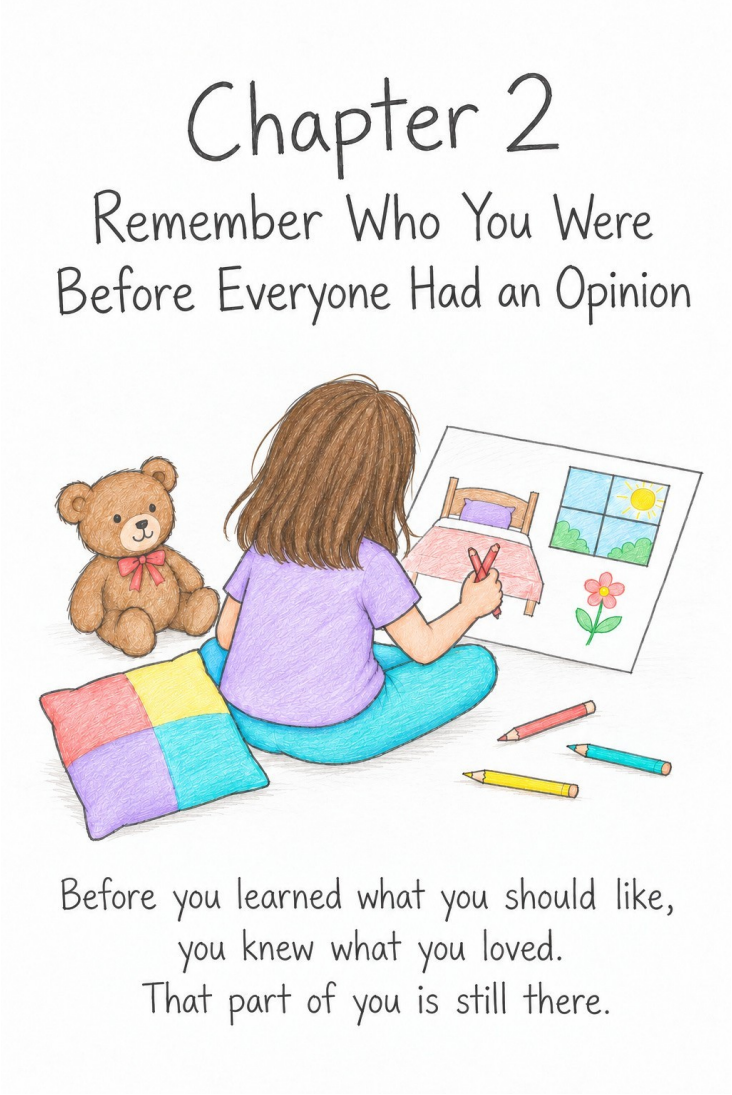
That's what the rest of this book is for.

I'm going to give you a framework for understanding your design identity, because it is hard to make a space feel like you if you have never stopped to ask what you like and need. Then we'll take that idea into twelve different parts of daily life and turn it into things you can try, even if your budget is zero.

Before we get there, I want to go backward for a minute. Before Pinterest boards, TikTok room tours, and having an opinion about whether something is "aesthetic."

Back to when you were a kid and liking something was usually enough of a reason to like it.

There are clues there.



When I was eight years old, I designed a room for the first time. It was the playroom under the stairs, the Harry Potter room from the introduction.

Nobody asked me to, and nobody showed me how. I just knew which color I wanted to see first when I walked in, where the desk should go, and which of my drawings belonged on the wall. I didn't know anything about interior design. I just knew when the room felt better.

You probably had opinions like that too, even if yours looked completely different from mine.

• • •

You Had Taste Before Anyone Taught You What Taste Was

Think about yourself as a kid. What colors did you reach for? What textures did you love? Did you build forts out of blankets or line your toys up perfectly? Did you want your room to be a jungle, a spaceship, a princess castle, a soccer shrine, or a secret hideout? Did you collect rocks, shells, stickers, ticket stubs, random tiny objects that made absolutely no sense to anyone else?

I'm not saying your eight-year-old self secretly knew your forever style. Kids change, and your taste should change too. But those early choices are worth looking at because they came from a version of you that was usually less worried about whether something looked cool.

Kids are brutally honest about what they like. They aren't checking whether a shade of purple is trending. They don't worry that a collection looks too weird for Instagram. If they love something, they want it where they can see it.

Before you knew there were supposed to be rules about "good taste," you just liked things. That's useful information.

That pull toward certain colors, textures, shapes, objects, and feelings is part of what I mean by design identity. It can change as you grow, obviously. But some of the patterns stick around, and they are useful clues.

• • •

The Great Editing

Here's what happens. You're a kid and you like what you like with almost no apology. Then, slowly, other opinions get louder.

A parent says that color is too much. A friend says something is weird. School gives you beige walls, fluorescent lights, and furniture nobody asked for. Social media shows you the same perfect rooms over and over until they start to look like the definition of good taste.

So you adjust. You pick the safer option. You buy the bedding everyone else has because at least you know it won't look stupid. You start wondering whether your own taste is wrong instead of just different.

Usually there isn't one dramatic moment where this happens. It's a bunch of tiny edits. By the time you're in high school or college, you can end up surrounded by things that are completely fine and still wonder why none of it feels very personal.

None of it is ugly. None of it is terrible. It is just kind of... not you.

That feeling is worth noticing.

My first big edit happened before kindergarten, and I only know about it from my family. We moved to Brazil when I was two and moved back two and a half years later, and by then Portuguese was the language I reached for first, even at home. Back in the United States, I stopped speaking it almost immediately. Nobody made me. I wanted to sound like the other kids at preschool, and apparently I was very determined about it. I still love the parts of Brazil that stayed in our house, the food, the soccer, the music, and I would like to get the language back someday. But I think about that four year old a lot. She traded something real for the feeling of blending in, and she didn't even have social media to blame.

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What Younger You Already Knew

Think about a space you loved as a kid. Maybe it was your bedroom, a grandparent's house, a treehouse, a reading corner, the backyard, or even a friend's house you always wanted to stay at.

What did you like about being there? Maybe it felt cozy. Maybe you could be loud. Maybe everything had a place. Maybe it was colorful, private, sunny, messy, quiet, or full of people. Write down three words for that feeling. Put them in your notes app if you want. Those words are useful because they tell you something about what your younger self responded to before you had design vocabulary for it.

The kid who loved color might still feel strange in an all-white room, even if that room looks perfect online. The kid who built blanket forts might still love enclosed, cozy spaces. The kid who arranged everything in perfect rows might still relax when a room has order.

Your childhood self didn't know more about design. They just weren't trying so hard to get the answer right.

• • •

The Lie of Growing Up

There's a weird idea that growing up means your taste is supposed to become more serious. You are supposed to want less color, fewer weird collections, and everything neutral and clean enough to belong in the same apartment tour. Every apartment tour is the same apartment. I think there is one apartment and they keep filming it.

Of course your taste changes. You probably don't want the exact room you wanted at eight. But the reason you loved something can survive long after the thing itself does. Maybe the dinosaur stickers were really about being obsessed with nature. Maybe the princess canopy was about softness and feeling protected. Maybe the wall covered in photos was about connection.

Growing up should give you more ways to express yourself, and it does. You get more choices now, so you might as well make some of them yours.

Think about the spaces you really love being in. Not necessarily the ones that would photograph best. The ones where you walk in and immediately learn something about the person who lives there. Those are usually the rooms I remember.

• • •

What You Loved Then Still Matters Now

I'm not saying you should recreate your childhood bedroom. I'm saying it might contain useful information.

If you loved bright color as a kid and everything you own now is gray because gray felt safer, pay attention to that. Maybe you genuinely love neutrals now. Or maybe you edited yourself more than you realized. Both answers are allowed.

If you loved collecting and displaying things but your shelves are empty because you decided minimalism was the only grown-up option, ask whether the empty shelf makes you feel better.

If you were happiest outside and your current room has nothing natural in it, maybe a plant, a piece of wood, a view of the sky, or even a nature photo would make it feel more like yours. One small natural element is enough to test the idea.

Your younger self doesn't get the final vote. But they might have left you some really good clues.

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A Quick Exercise (Do This, Seriously)

Grab your phone. Open your notes app. Answer these five questions fast, before you start trying to give the "right" answer:

One: What was your favorite color as a kid?

Two: Describe a place where you felt happiest as a kid in three words.

Three: Did you like things organized, beautifully messy, or somewhere in between?

Four: What's one thing you loved having around that you don't have anymore?

Five: If eight-year-old you walked into your current room, what would they love first? What would they question?

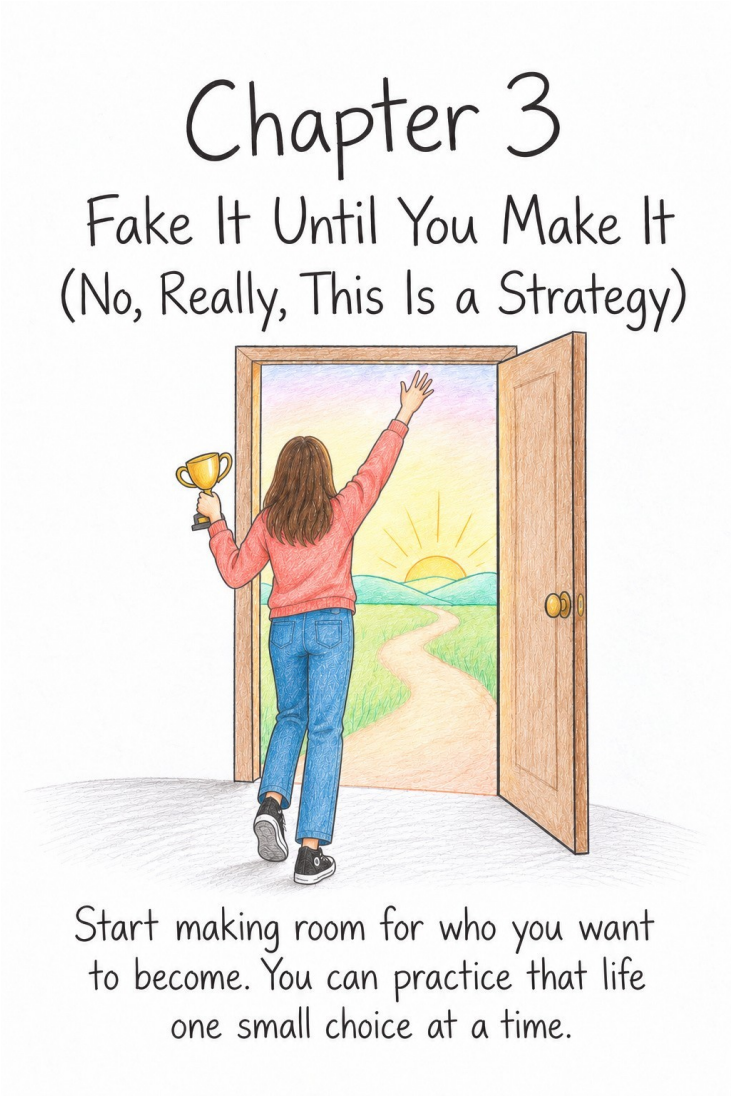
Your answers are not a diagnosis or a rulebook. They're clues. When we get to the 12 Design Archetypes in Part Two, you can compare those early preferences with what you like now and see what still fits.

Next we're going to try a slightly weird idea I got obsessed with while researching this: can you use your surroundings to practice how you want to feel before the rest of your life is fully there yet?

That's where "fake it until you make it" gets a design version.

Chapter 3

Fake It Until You Make It (No, Really, This Is a Strategy)



There's a phrase people love to throw around: fake it till you make it.

Usually that means acting confident before you feel confident. Give the presentation even if your hands are shaking. Walk into the first day of a new job like you know where the printer is. Pretend you are less nervous than you are until, eventually, you really are less nervous.

In the fall of my senior year, my class went to the courthouse to practice how a bill becomes law, and I wore a black suit for the first time. It was a real blazer with real trousers, and it had shoulder pads. My mom grew up in the eighties, so the shoulder pads made her laugh.

I expected to feel like a kid playing dress up. Instead, I felt powerful. One of my teachers told me I looked like I could be his boss. I'm building a company of my own, so you can imagine how much I liked hearing that. I carried the compliment around for the rest of the day. I even caught myself standing straighter.

I'm five foot nine. Next time, I'm adding three inch heels so I'll be six feet tall and can look the men in a meeting right in the eye. The heels won't give me the experience to run a

business. I'll have to earn that. But I liked getting a glimpse of the person I'm working toward. I left the courthouse wanting to feel that way again.

The suit changed how I carried myself for an afternoon, and it made me wonder whether a room could do a smaller version of the same thing.

I'm interested in a different version of it: using your surroundings to rehearse the feelings and habits you want more of before your life looks completely different.

That sounded a little ridiculous to me at first too. Then I started reading about how much our brains respond to cues from the spaces around us, and it made way more sense.

• • •

Your Brain Notices the Room

I used to think a room was mostly a backdrop. Then I started researching how light, clutter, sound, color, objects, and even where things are placed can affect attention, stress, memory, and mood. A room does not control you, but your brain is still taking it in.
The price tag part surprised me most: your brain does not care what anything cost.

It does not know whether the candle on your nightstand was five dollars or fifty, or whether the art on your wall came from a gallery, a thrift store, or a friend. What matters more is what your senses are taking in and what those things mean to you.

So if your room feels calm, easy to use, and personal, it may be easier to settle down, focus, or sleep. If everything you need is buried under piles and the lighting makes you want to leave, that adds friction before you have even started.

A messy room will not ruin your day, and a cute lamp will not fix your life. I wish. Your surroundings can still make certain feelings and behaviors easier or harder.

Your room cannot do your homework, make your decisions, or magically give you confidence. But it can make the next good choice a little easier to make.

That was the idea I kept circling while researching this chapter: environment is not destiny, but it is one of the cues around you all day. If you can change a few of those cues, that is worth knowing.

• • •

The Rehearsal Space

Think about actors for a second. Before a performance, they rehearse. They practice the lines, move through the scene, and get used to the space so it feels less unfamiliar when it counts.

You can do a small version of that in real life.

If you want schoolwork to feel less chaotic, make one place where the stuff you need is within reach. If you want to make more art, leave your sketchbook where you can see it. If you want friends to hang out, make the room feel like there is somewhere for them to sit.

You're not pretending you already have some perfect future life. You're giving yourself a setting that supports the thing you're trying to practice. That is what the suit did for me for an afternoon.

When I've redone my own room or helped a friend or family member rethink theirs, the changes that matter are usually not dramatic. A desk becomes easier to use. A corner feels calmer. Something they forgot they loved comes back out of a drawer. Small changes can make the whole room look different to you.

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Six Things a Space Can Support

When I say design for the life you want, I am not talking about making your room look expensive so you can pretend you're rich. I mean thinking about what you want daily life to feel like and asking whether your space helps.

I kept coming back to six things while I was researching and writing this book: health, money, joy, connection, peace, and feeling like yourself. Design cannot create any of them by itself, but it can support the habits and feelings around them.

Health. Your room can support basics like sleep, movement, and getting out the door on time. Light, noise, temperature, clutter, and where you keep things can all affect how easy those routines feel. That is a lot more realistic than pretending a room can make you healthy. It can at least keep you from stepping on a charger at 2 a.m., which is close.

Money. A space cannot make you wealthy. It can, however, help you take better care of what you already own. Seeing what you have, using things instead of rebuying them, repairing something, borrowing, thrifting, and making a small budget go further are all design decisions too.

Joy. This one is simpler. Your room should contain at least a few things you genuinely like looking at. A color, a photo, a weird little thrift-store object, a blanket you love. Not everything needs a productivity purpose.

Connection. Spaces can make hanging out easier or more awkward. Two places to sit facing each other, enough light to see people's faces, somewhere to put a snack, or a floor cushion in a dorm can change how people use a room.

Peace. You cannot control everything happening outside your room, but you can learn what helps you come down from the day. Maybe that is softer lighting, less visual clutter, music, clean sheets, or five minutes when nobody needs anything from you.

Feeling like yourself. This is the part where your space belongs to you, not to an algorithm, your parents' taste, an old phase, or whatever everyone else is buying right now. You should be able to look around and recognize something of yourself there.

That is all I mean by designing for a fuller life. Your room will not hand you health, money, joy, connection, peace, or a sense of self. It can still make some of those things easier to practice.

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You Don't Need a Big Budget

I know what you're thinking. Cool, Mia. I would love a room that supports all six of those things. My budget is approximately forty-seven dollars and my roommate leaves dishes in the sink.

That is fair. I'm seventeen. I am not working with an interior-design budget either, and I am definitely not asking you to buy a whole new life at Target. I've earned my own spending money since I was eleven, babysitting first, then dog sitting, then lifeguarding once I was old enough, so I know exactly how long it takes to earn $47.

A lot of the best changes cost little or nothing.

You can rearrange furniture, clear off a desk, swap what is on your walls, move a lamp, wash your bedding, organize the stuff you use, or put one meaningful object somewhere you will see it. If you want to spend a little, thrift stores, hand-me-downs, neighborhood groups, and secondhand marketplaces can stretch a small budget a lot further.

None of that is glamorous. I have never seen a dramatic before and after about moving a lamp. It can still make a room easier and nicer to live in.

Sometimes the move is as small as bringing a favorite photo out of your camera roll and printing it, moving a chair so you use it, or putting the art supplies you keep forgetting about on an open shelf. The change matters because it connects the room to your real life.

That is the rehearsal: not pretending the future already happened, but putting a few cues for the life you want into the space you have now.

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What This Looks Like in Practice

Here are a few ways that can look in real life.

Want better sleep? Start with the bedroom basics. Clear enough space around the bed that getting in does not feel like an obstacle course. Charge your phone a little farther away if late-night scrolling is eating your sleep. Make the bed if that helps the room feel reset, and skip it if it does not.

Want to feel more settled? Unpack the box that has been sitting there for three months. Hang one thing you love. Use the mug or plate you keep saving for some imaginary better day. Treating your current space like it counts can make it feel less temporary, even if you know you will move again.

Want more creativity? Give your creative stuff somewhere visible to live. A sketchbook, guitar, camera, sewing basket, notebook, whatever your thing is. If getting to it requires moving six other things first, you are less likely to use it.

Want more connection? Make one spot where another person can comfortably exist. In a dorm, that might be a floor cushion. In a bedroom, maybe it is clearing the chair that currently holds seventeen hoodies. Tiny spaces can still say, sit here.

Want more calm? Look at what your eyes hit first when you enter the room. If it is a pile that stresses you out, deal with that pile before you buy a single new thing. Softer light can help too, especially at night.

You can make a room work better and feel more like you on almost no money.

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The Feeling Comes First

Researchers use the term embodied cognition for the idea that thinking is connected to what our bodies are doing and perceiving. I like it because it pushes against the idea that your mind is somehow separate from the physical world around you.

It is not a neat formula where room equals mood equals life. There are way too many variables for that. A more realistic takeaway is that physical surroundings can be one part of how a moment feels.

Which is useful, because your surroundings are one of the things you can sometimes change right now.

You do not have to wait until you have the perfect job, apartment, body, relationship, or bank account to make your current space support you better. You can start before any of that is figured out.

This is not pretending everything is amazing when it is not. If life is hard, changing your lamp does not erase that. It can still make one corner of the day feel better.

That is enough. Design does not have to solve your whole life to be worth doing.

You're not faking a life. You're trying a setup and seeing whether it helps.

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One More Thing Before We Move On

Everything in this chapter applies to more than your bedroom. It can show up in what you wear, where you study, what is on your phone, the music you play, the way you eat with people, and the routines that make up a normal Tuesday. We'll get into all of that in Part Three.

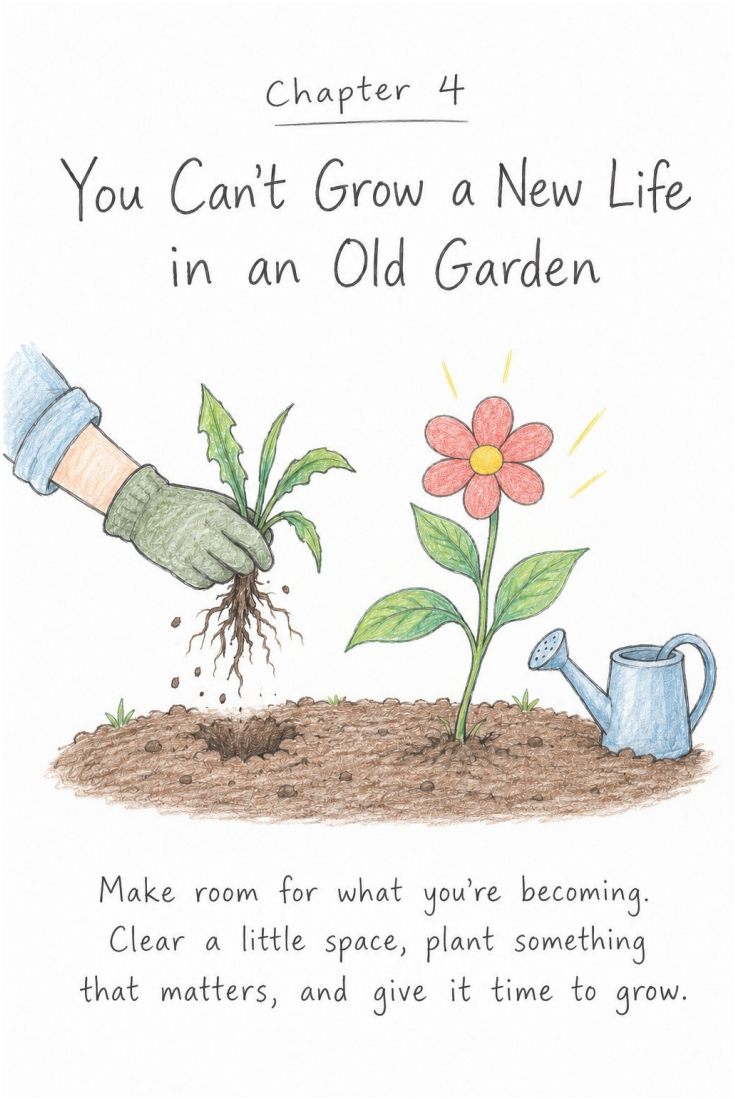
For now, remember this: you do not have to wait for your life to get better before your surroundings get better. Sometimes improving the surroundings is one small way to make the rest easier.

Start small. Use what you have.

Seriously, one thing is enough.

Next we need to talk about the stuff that belongs to an older version of you, because sometimes the hardest part of changing a space is admitting that something does not fit anymore.

Next comes the garden metaphor.



I kept coming back to a plant example while I was writing this chapter, because it makes the point better than a motivational quote.

A pothos can survive in lower light. That is one reason people love them. But surviving and growing well are not the same thing. In a darker spot, growth can slow and the plant may get leggier as it reaches for light.

Move it somewhere with better indirect light and give it decent care, and the conditions change. It is the same plant in a different environment.

You are not a pothos, obviously. Your life is a lot more complicated than moving three feet toward a window.

But the basic idea stuck with me: sometimes the problem is not the thing itself. Sometimes the conditions around it are making growth harder than it needs to be.

• • •

When the Old Version of Your Space Lingers

The last chapter was about using your environment to support what you want more of. This one is about the opposite problem: what happens when your space still looks like a chapter of your life you have already moved past.

You can change a lot internally while your room, closet, phone, and routines stay frozen in an older phase.

That mismatch can be weird. You know you have changed, but your surroundings keep handing you the same old cues.

You make goals, save inspiration, promise yourself this semester will be different, and then sit down at the same disaster of a desk where you spent last semester avoiding everything. The desk is not causing procrastination, but it is not exactly helping either.

A journal, vision board, or good playlist can be useful. They just work better when your daily environment is not fighting every plan you make.

This does not mean throwing away your room and starting over. It means noticing which parts still fit and which ones are hanging around only because you stopped seeing them.

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Your Brain Builds Associations With Places

One reason old spaces can feel so strong is that our brains make associations between places, objects, smells, sounds, and what was happening when we experienced them.

That is why walking into a childhood bedroom can make you feel younger for a second, or why one smell can bring back a memory before you have even figured out what the smell is. Context can become attached to memory and emotion.

Sometimes those associations are comforting. Sometimes they are not.

If you spent months getting over a breakup in the same room, certain parts of that room may remind you of that period even after you feel much better. That does not mean the couch is secretly storing heartbreak. It means your brain is good at connecting experiences with context.

The same thing can happen after a brutal semester, a friendship falling apart, an injury, or just a stretch of time when you did not feel like yourself. A desk, playlist, hoodie, or corner of the room can become part of the memory.

Changing the setup will not erase what happened, but it can make the space feel newly yours. Moving furniture, changing what is on the wall, cleaning, or swapping the bedding can create fresh cues instead of leaving everything exactly as it was.

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The Stuff You're Still Carrying

This is not only about huge emotional moments. A lot of it is ordinary stuff that belongs to a version of you that is simply over.

Start with the clothes you keep because you used to wear them all the time, even though you have not reached for them in a year. I mean the old team shirt, the jeans that never fit right, and the dress you bought for one event and somehow feel guilty donating.

Then there is the decor that was a gift from someone you are not close to anymore. Maybe you still love it, in which case keep it. Maybe you never liked it and the only reason it is on the shelf is guilt.

There is also the hand-me-down furniture or childhood piece that did its job for years but no longer works for how you use the room now. You do not have to replace it tomorrow. You can at least admit that it is a compromise instead of pretending it is your dream chair.

Add the old photos, the hobby supplies from a phase you left behind, and the bulletin board full of goals that are not even your goals anymore. A room can quietly turn into a museum of every phase you've ever had.

Some of that stuff is meaningful history. Some of it is just taking up space. Knowing which is which makes the next decision easier.

The best example I have is sitting in my room right now. My dressers were my brother's when he was a baby, back when they were blue. At some point my dad painted them white with pink legs and stenciled flowers across the fronts, and my mom bought custom flower drawer pulls to match. He is also the one who painted clouds on the nursery ceiling that came out looking like the clouds from The Simpsons, which was not the plan. I love the flowers. I have also outgrown the pink. For a while I thought those two facts meant the dressers had to go, and I could not make myself do it, because my dad took such care to make them beautiful for me and my mom had picked out those drawer pulls. Then I realized the choice was never all or nothing. The dressers are solid, the stencils are my dad, the drawer pulls are my mom, and the legs are a weekend with a can of white paint. I could keep the part that mattered and change the part I grew out of.

Not every object needs to pull you toward some amazing future. Plenty of things can just be useful or neutral. But if something makes you feel bad every time you see it, or keeps telling a story you no longer want to live in, it is worth asking why it is still there.

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Familiar Is Easy

Another reason spaces stay the same is much less dramatic: familiar is easy.

Once you know where everything is and you have stopped really looking at the room, changing it takes effort. You have to make decisions, move things, spend time, maybe spend money, and risk deciding you hate the result. Leaving it alone is simpler.

And some reasons for not changing a space are completely real: you cannot paint, you share the room, money is tight, or your parents will absolutely notice if you move the giant dresser. Maybe your lease says no nails and your RA takes that personally.

Not every hesitation is your brain sabotaging you. Separate real constraints from automatic habits. 'I cannot afford a new desk' is different from 'I have never tried turning the desk ninety degrees.'

Work with the real constraint. Change the part you can change and leave the rest alone for now.

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When You Stop Seeing the Room

The sneakiest problem with an old setup is that eventually you stop seeing it.

The pile on the chair becomes The Pile. The random box becomes part of the floor plan. The poster you stopped liking two years ago basically turns invisible because your brain has seen it so many times.

When everything fades into the background, it is easy to stop asking whether the room still works for you. Nothing has to be terrible for a space to stop fitting.

A small change can help because it makes you look again. Once one corner changes, the lamp, shelf, clothes, and other things you had tuned out become easier to see.

I like this because it takes the pressure off. Skip the dramatic before-and-after. Move one thing, clear one surface, or swap one image. Then see what feels better and what still annoys you.

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The Wardrobe Version of This

This applies to more than your room. Your closet, phone, and routines collect old phases too.

Closets are basically time capsules. There is the shirt from a phase you were obsessed with, the thing you bought because everyone else had one, the outfit that does not really feel like you anymore, plus the five things you wear constantly. Open the closet and you will probably know exactly what I mean.

In the fall of my senior year, almost every piece of clothing I owned ended up on my brother's old bed.

That is not a metaphor. I was writing this book for people moving into dorms and first apartments, and I wanted to practice that move before it was real. I had done my share of moving already, to Brazil and back and between my mom's and my dad's places when I was young. So I carried everything into the room next door, which had been empty since my brother moved out, and turned it into a staging area, the way I would the following summer. There was a mountain of thrifted everything, a smaller mountain of things I bought because

everyone had them, a pile I had not reached for in a year, and a few pieces I would run back into a burning house for. My own room, meanwhile, had a new white bed frame, new bedding, one empty wall, and a question I kept circling: what goes there?

I was practicing on the room I had. If I got it wrong, the only witness was my brother's old bed.

Your digital space does it too. Old lock screens, saved posts you do not care about anymore, a camera roll full of screenshots, apps you never use, a social feed that keeps showing you a phase you have moved on from.

Routines can get outdated too. Something that helped during a stressful semester might not fit now. A habit you started because you were exhausted can keep going long after you have forgotten why it started.

Forget the labels old garden and new garden. Ask what still supports your life and what is there mostly because it has always been there.

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How to Start Pulling Weeds

I am not going to tell you to throw half your room away. That is wasteful, expensive, and also a great way to regret everything tomorrow.

Walk through your space and look at the things you normally look past. Ask: do I use this, love this, need this, or have a real reason to keep it?
If yes, keep it. If not, you still have options. Donate it, sell it, give it to a friend, recycle it if possible, store it if it matters but does not need to be out, or leave it alone until you are sure.

Do the same with one section of your closet, one folder on your phone, or one routine. A weekend makeover is unnecessary. One shelf counts.

As you remove things, add carefully. Do not clear space just to refill it. Bring in something only if it is useful, meaningful, beautiful to you, or makes the space work better.

That is the difference between decluttering and redesigning. One makes room. The other decides what deserves the room.

You probably need some of both.

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The Garden Metaphor, One More Time

I know I have pushed this garden metaphor pretty hard, but it still works.

You would not plant something new in a pot full of dead roots and expect it to thrive. You clear what is dead, keep what is still healthy, refresh the soil, and make room for new growth.

That is a better way to think about your space too. You are not erasing your past. Keep the things that still matter. Make room around them for what fits now.

If your environment constantly cues habits or feelings you are trying to change, those changes may be harder than they need to be. A few thoughtful updates can lower that friction.

Pick one thing. Make one change. Then see whether the room feels any different.

Next: why so many rooms end up looking weirdly similar, and how to tell the difference between a trend you genuinely love and one you absorbed because you saw it four hundred times.



Open TikTok, Pinterest, or Instagram and search bedroom inspiration for thirty seconds.

You will probably start seeing patterns almost immediately.

You will see white walls, light wood, cream bedding, a round mirror, and maybe a tiny lamp, one plant, and a shelf that somehow contains exactly three objects. Search dorm rooms and you get another familiar set: LED lights, matching storage bins, the same rolling cart. None of these things are bad. I like some of them. The weird part is how quickly one good idea can start looking like the only idea.

I noticed this when I started saving rooms I liked. After a while, my inspiration folders could start looking less like me and more like whatever the algorithm had shown me most often. Sometimes repetition starts to feel a lot like preference.

That made me wonder: how much of our taste is really ours, and how much of it is repetition?

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How Everything Started Looking Familiar

People have always copied each other. Design trends are not new, and neither is buying the same popular furniture as everyone else. What feels different now is the speed. One room can go viral, get reposted thousands of times, turn into a shopping list, and show up in bedrooms everywhere before you have even decided whether you genuinely like it.

A few things make that happen.

First, affordable mass-produced furniture and decor make it easy for a lot of us to shop from the same places. That is genuinely useful, especially when you are furnishing a dorm, bedroom, or first apartment on a budget. The downside is that the same affordable options can become the default for everyone.

Second, social media turns rooms into images. A room that photographs well can spread fast, and then the platform shows you more rooms that look similar because you stopped to look at the first one. Soon it can feel as if that style is everywhere.

Third, design content loves labels and rules because they make choices easier. The labels are minimalist, coastal, boho, dark academia, clean and neutral, or whatever is having a moment. Labels can help, but they can also make you ask, does this fit the aesthetic? before you ask, do I even like this?

Put all of that together and it is very easy to end up with a room that looks good online but does not say much about the person who sleeps there.

That is the part I care about.

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The Sad Beige Epidemic

I call it the sad beige epidemic. Yes, I know that is dramatic. I am keeping it.

There is nothing wrong with beige, cream, white, gray, or any other neutral. I love a lot of neutral rooms. The problem starts when 'neutral' becomes code for 'I was afraid to choose.'

If warm whites, soft linen, natural wood, and very little visual noise genuinely make you happy, great. That may be exactly your design identity. A Minimalist should not add hot-pink wallpaper just to prove they have a personality.

But sometimes we pick the safest option because it is easier to defend. Nobody makes fun of the beige comforter. Nobody asks why you chose the white wall. I understand the appeal more than I would like to. I spent a year of middle school dressed in the clothing version of a beige room, and I will get into that in Chapter 12. Safe choices can be useful, especially when money is tight or you share a space. They just should not automatically become your taste.

Not offending anyone is a pretty low bar for a room you have to live in every day.

The better question is whether the space feels comfortable, useful, and recognizably yours.

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What Sameness Can Cost

When every decision comes from a trend, you can lose useful information about yourself.

Your room is one of the places where your preferences become visible. Maybe you love saturated color but keep buying neutrals. Maybe you need things hidden away to focus, or maybe closed cabinets make you forget everything you own. Maybe you want photos everywhere while your roommate wants blank walls. Those little preferences are useful clues about what makes a space easier or nicer for you to live in.

If you never test your own preferences, it is easy to assume you just do not have strong ones. I hear versions of 'I don't really have a style' from friends, and usually they do. They just have not had much practice choosing without a trend, parent, roommate, or price tag choosing first.

You figure out taste partly by making choices and then living with them.

When you make even a few choices that are really yours, you start learning faster. You see which colors you keep staring at, what kind of lighting makes you stay at your desk, which objects you want to display, and what you are tired of seeing.

Your room does not have to prove who you are. It can simply help you learn what you like.

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The Permission Problem

I think permission is part of this too.

It can feel risky to choose something weird when the safe version is right there and has 40,000 likes. Design advice also makes everything sound more permanent than it is. The 'wrong' lamp is not a personality failure. A poster can come down. A thrifted chair can be resold. Trying something is allowed.

That matters even more when you are young because your taste is still moving. Mine is. Something I loved at fourteen might make me laugh now, and something I would have ignored two years ago might suddenly be exactly right.

I would rather make a specific choice, live with it, and learn something than fill a room with choices I made only because nobody could criticize them.

A room with a point of view is usually more interesting than a room that was designed never to be wrong.

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The Algorithm Is Not Your Designer

Social media is useful for ideas. I use it too. The trick is remembering what it is good at and what it is not.

Your feed is built to keep showing you things you are likely to watch, save, or click. That can make one aesthetic feel much more universal than it really is. If you pause on three moody green bedrooms, congratulations, you may be living inside moody-green-bedroom internet for the rest of the week.

That is great when you are collecting inspiration. It is less great when repetition starts feeling like proof that you should want the same thing.

Save what you love, but pay attention to why you saved it. Was it the whole room? The light? One color? The fact that it looked expensive? The way the bed felt tucked into a corner? Pull apart the image instead of copying it.

Your feed can give you references. You still get the final vote.

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What Your Room Should Actually Do

Forget how a room photographs for a minute. What does it need to do for you?

Maybe you need to sleep, study, get dressed, have friends over, stretch after practice, do your makeup, make art, or hide from everyone for twenty minutes. A good room supports the life happening inside it.

It should also give you at least a few things you are happy to see. That could be color, photos, a ridiculous lamp, a clean empty wall, a stack of books, a soccer jersey, shells from a trip, or one perfect blanket. There is no universal answer.

And it should give you somewhere you can stop performing. Your room does not need to impress your friends, your followers, or a person on Pinterest who will never see it. If nobody ever saw your room online, what would you keep? What would you change? What would you want a new friend to notice first?

The best compliment, to me, is not 'this looks expensive.' It is 'this is so you.'

Beautiful is great. Yours is better.

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The Bridge to Part Two

So far, we have talked about how surroundings can affect us, why old spaces can keep old associations hanging around, and how easy it is to absorb a look just because we see it everywhere.

The next question is obvious: if a trend is not going to make every decision for you, what will?

You need a way to see your own patterns: what you keep choosing, what calms you down, what wakes you up, what feels like too much, what feels boring, and what you miss when it is gone.

That is what Part Two is for.

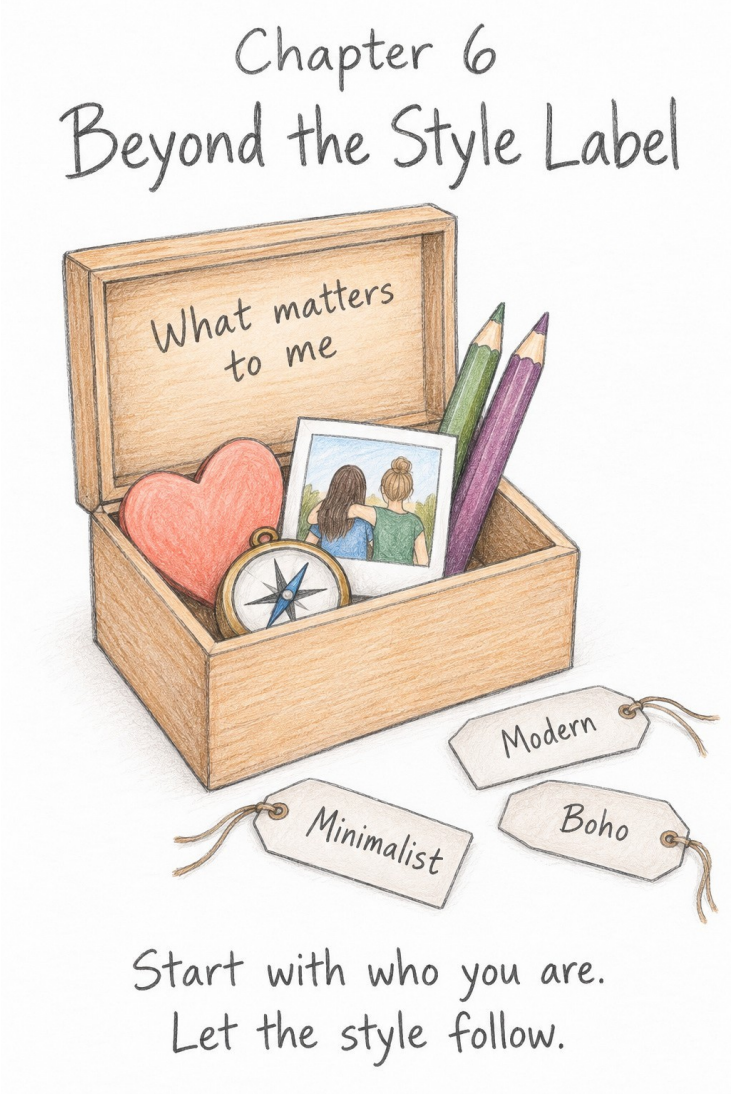
I built the 12 Design Archetypes as a way to organize those patterns without reducing you to 'boho' or 'modern.'

You may recognize yourself immediately. You may also argue with your result. Both are useful.

PART TWO

Your Design Identity

Who You Actually Are (Not Who Instagram Told You to Be)



Quick question: if someone asked for your design style right now, what would you say?

Maybe modern? Boho? Minimalist? 'Whatever is cheap and ships fast'? Honestly, that last one is probably the most accurate for a lot of us.

Traditional style labels can be useful. They help you search, shop, and explain a look. I just kept feeling like they stopped too early.

If someone says they love mid-century modern, I know something about the furniture they might choose. I still do not know whether they want their room to feel calm, energizing, private, social, polished, weird, cozy, dramatic, or anything else that changes how the space works for them.

That gap is what I wanted to explore.

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Why Style Labels Only Tell Part of the Story

There are dozens of design labels floating around: Scandinavian, bohemian, traditional, coastal, industrial, Art Deco, organic modern, maximalist, minimalist, and new ones that seem to appear every five minutes.

They are useful shorthand. If you type 'coastal bedroom' into a search bar, you will get a pretty recognizable visual language. That can save time.

But you are not a search term.

Two people can love the exact same room photo for completely different reasons. One loves the light. One loves the order. One loves the vintage chair. One just wants a room that feels quiet after a chaotic day.

The look matters. I just wanted a framework that also asks what is underneath the look.

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The Quiz Problem

You have probably taken an online style quiz where you choose between photos and get a result like Coastal Farmhouse or Modern Eclectic. I have. They are fun.

They can also be weirdly convincing for about five minutes. You read the description and think, wait, that is kind of me. Then you close the tab and forget what you got.

A picture quiz mostly tells you which images you chose in that moment. I wanted to ask different questions too. How do you want a space to feel? Do you like a lot to look at or very little? Do you want your room ready for people or mostly private? What do you collect without meaning to? What do you keep liking even after the trend changes?

Those answers still are not your entire personality. No quiz can do that. But they can reveal patterns that a style label misses.

That is the idea behind the 12 Design Archetypes: not a diagnosis, just a lens.

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Where This Framework Comes From

While I was researching personality, identity, and design, I kept running into archetypes. Carl Jung is one of the best-known names connected to the idea, and archetypes have since been adapted in storytelling, branding, and other fields in all kinds of ways. I am aware that I am seventeen and citing Carl Jung. I was surprised too. If you take an introductory psychology class in college, you will probably run into him anyway.

I was interested in whether that kind of pattern language could be useful for design, especially if it could help someone see what they keep needing from a space instead of telling them what sofa to buy.

So I built my own 12 Design Archetypes. They are inspired by archetypal thinking, but they are not a psychological test and twelve types obviously cannot explain a whole person. I built them as a design tool from research, my own experiments, and conversations with friends and family about what they need and keep choosing in their spaces.

Each archetype groups together certain preferences, values, and feelings that can show up in design. It is not there to hand you an identity. It gives you language that might make your own patterns easier to see.

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What Makes This Different

Here is what I want the archetypes to do, and what I do not want them to do.

They are not shopping lists. Two people with the same archetype can have completely different rooms. Budget matters. Culture matters. Family, location, taste, and the stuff you already own all matter too.

They are not permanent boxes either. You can change. Your room can change. What you need during finals week might not be what you need next summer, and the blend that feels right at seventeen might look different later.

They also are not only about interiors. I use the same questions across twelve dimensions: home, wardrobe, garden or nature, workspace, digital presence, table, rituals, people, movement, scent, sound, and legacy.

Most important, treat the archetypes as prompts. They do not prove anything about you. If a description helps you see something true about yourself, use it. If it does not fit, ignore it. A quiz should help you ask better questions, and it has no business telling you who you are.

A style label can help you search for a chair. An archetype can help you ask why you keep choosing that chair in the first place.

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The Fresh Start Trap

If you are about to move somewhere new, there is one more thing worth saying before you meet the archetypes. A new school, a new city, or a dorm full of strangers may be the first time in your life that nobody knows you. That can feel like an invitation to show up as a brand new person, with a new look, a new personality, and a new room that matches neither. I get the appeal. I have also heard from enough older friends to know how it goes: they spend an entire first semester maintaining a person they invented in August.

Archetypes help you recognize the person who is already there, so you can bring that person into a new place with you. The photo you love, the thing you make, and the music you play when nobody is around can help a new friend find the real you. You can learn what you love about the new place and still be recognizable to yourself.

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How to Use What Comes Next

In the next chapter you will meet all 12 archetypes. Do not turn it into a test you have to pass.

Pay attention to which descriptions make you pause, laugh, disagree, or send a screenshot to a friend with 'this is literally you.' That reaction is useful information, but it is not destiny.

You might connect with one archetype right away, or with two or three. I use primary and secondary blends instead of forcing everyone into one box, and Chapter 8 gets into how those blends work. Changing your mind later is completely fine.



Here they are: the 12 Design Archetypes. Read all 12 before you decide anything. You are not hunting for a perfect label. See which descriptions sound familiar and which ones make you think, nope, absolutely not me.

You might connect with one right away, or keep circling back to two or three. That is useful. You might also change your mind after you look at your actual room, closet, camera roll, or saved posts. That is also useful.

Treat these like clues. Nothing here is carved in stone. None of the archetypes is better, deeper, or more evolved than another. You are not winning anything by getting Visionary.

DISCOVER YOUR ARCHETYPE

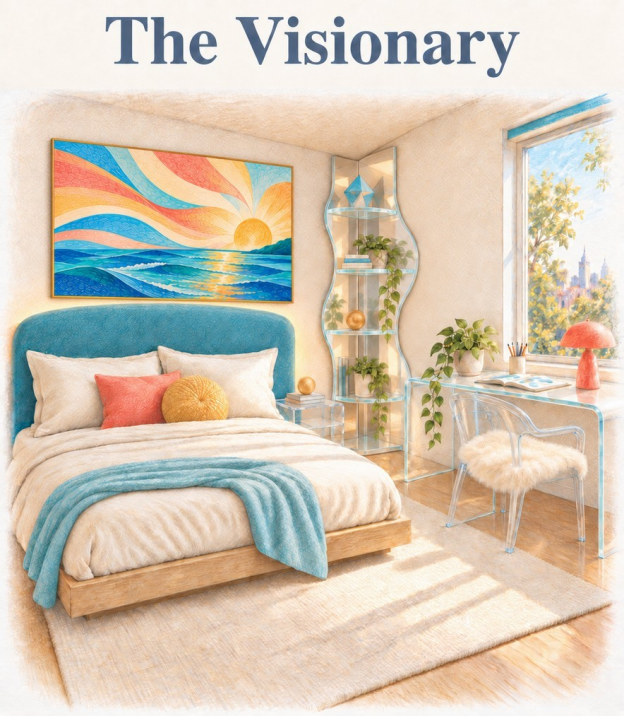
Want a quick starting point? Take the free design archetype quiz at room2flourish.com. It has twelve questions, takes a few minutes, and gives you a starting archetype plus a second one to explore. If you have a roommate on the way, send them the quiz too. Chapter 9 has three questions to ask each other once you both have a result, and they are a lot easier to ask before the first shopping trip than after.

A quiz can only get you started, so read the full descriptions too. If a result says Visionary but you keep thinking about Wildflower, pay attention to that. You know yourself better than a quiz does.

I wrote the longer descriptions below because I want you to ask better questions, and a label you can shop from will not get you there.

Archetype 1

The Visionary



Future-focused, bright, possibility-driven

You can see what a room could become almost before you take in what it is now. You are drawn to daylight, open space, clean shapes, and details that make things feel fresh instead of flat. Your version of simple still has personality. A better lamp, a clearer desk, one smart change that makes the whole room work better: that is very Visionary. Trends can be fun, but you would rather spot the next idea than copy the last one.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Light wood, brushed metal, clear glass or acrylic, white cotton, reflective details

PICTURE IT

A bright bedroom or dorm corner with great light, a clean desk, and one unexpected futuristic detail

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Daylight, open surfaces, new ideas, clean starts, room to think

WHAT DRAINS YOU

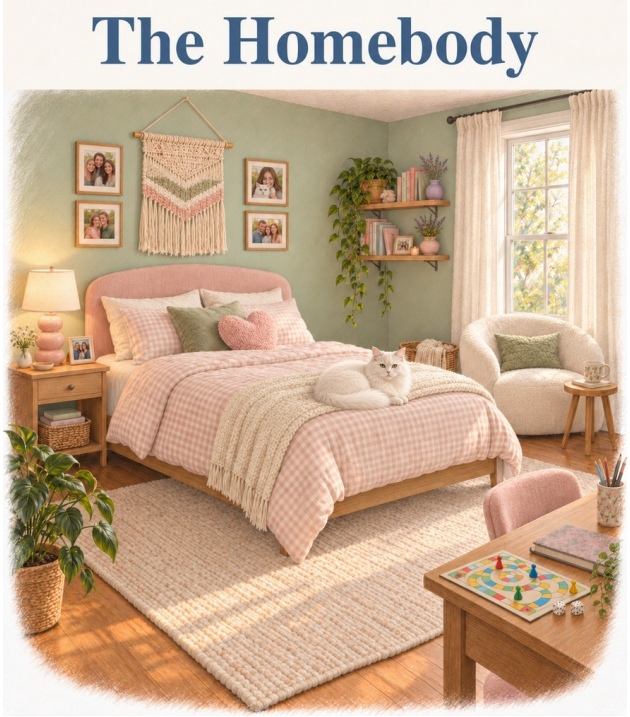
Dark cluttered rooms, stale routines, copying a look just because everyone else is doing it

DORM VERSION

Keep the desk clear, take the bed by the window if you can, and let one bright object stand out.

Archetype 2

The Homebody



Warm, tactile, grounded

You like rooms that feel settled, comfortable, and real. Natural materials, warm colors, worn-in textures, handmade things, and objects with history make sense to you. You would rather have a thrifted wood nightstand you love than something shiny that feels anonymous. Your space does not need to impress anyone. It needs to make you want to stay awhile.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Raw wood, clay, terracotta, woven baskets, cotton or linen, thrifted ceramics

PICTURE IT

A cozy bedroom with warm lamps, a wood shelf, a soft blanket, and something handmade from someone you love

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Natural materials, warmth, familiar objects, handmade pieces, things that age well

WHAT DRAINS YOU

Cold lighting, flimsy finishes, spaces that feel too polished to relax in

DORM VERSION

Bring one real blanket, swap the overhead light for a warm lamp, and add something thrifted and wooden, even if it is only a tray.

Archetype 3

The Mystic



Reflective, symbolic, drawn to meaning

You like spaces that feel private, thoughtful, and a little mysterious. That can mean candles, stars, prayer beads, crystals, tarot cards, meaningful jewelry, family objects, or none of those things. Symbolism matters to you. You pick up atmosphere fast. Bright overhead lighting can ruin a room in about three seconds. You want a corner where you can think, reset, journal, meditate, pray, or just be quiet without the whole world barging in.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Velvet, dark wood, amber glass, soft light, stones or crystals, hammered metal

PICTURE IT

A low-lit corner with a vintage rug, a soft lamp, and a few meaningful objects you chose for a reason

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Privacy, ritual, symbolism, soft light, objects with personal meaning

WHAT DRAINS YOU

Glare, noise, purely functional spaces, decor that feels random or empty

DORM VERSION

Use a low lamp, give one shelf to objects that mean something, and claim a corner that is yours alone, even if it is two feet wide.

Archetype 4

The Collector



Observant, selective, every piece has a reason

You care about the story behind things. A concert ticket, a print from a local artist, a bowl someone in your family gave you, a weird thrift-store frame, a book you have reread three times: those objects matter because they connect to something. Your room becomes a collection, and it never looks like you bought a matching set. Friends ask where things came from, and you usually have a story.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Framed prints, vintage wood, old books, thrift finds, metal frames, collected objects

PICTURE IT

A bedroom wall or shelf where almost everything has a story and your friends keep asking where you found it

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Art, craft, history, meaningful finds, collections that tell a story

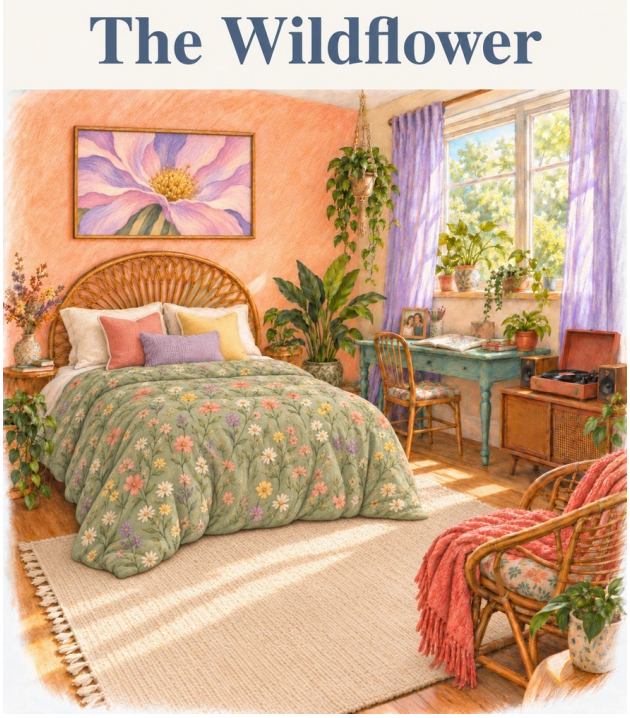
WHAT DRAINS YOU

Filler decor, random trend purchases, objects that take up space but mean nothing to you

DORM VERSION

Put three things with stories on the one shelf you control, and keep the rest in a box until it earns a spot.

Archetype 5
The Wildflower



Free-spirited, expressive, happily imperfect

You like color, pattern, texture, plants, handmade things, and combinations that technically should not work but somehow do. A room that is too matched can make you itchy. You are happy mixing thrifted finds, hand-me-downs, art, fabric, and whatever else makes the space feel alive. Rules are suggestions. If you love it and it works, you are keeping it.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES
Macrame, patchwork textiles, rattan, dried flowers, hand-dyed fabric, mismatched ceramics

PICTURE IT
A sunny bedroom with plants, layered blankets, art everywhere, and music playing while you get ready

WHAT FEEDS YOU
Color, plants, music, texture, freedom, handmade things, a little beautiful chaos

WHAT DRAINS YOU
Rigid rules, perfectly matched sets, rooms where nothing can move or change

DORM VERSION
Use removable hooks, cover your half of the wall with art, line the windowsill with plants, and pick a bedspread that clashes with the carpet on purpose.

Archetype 6

The Icon



Polished, clear, quietly powerful

You like a room to feel pulled together. Structure, symmetry, strong shapes, and a few really good details make you feel more focused. This does not have to mean expensive. A neatly made bed, a solid desk setup, coordinated storage, and one bold piece can create the same effect. You want your space to say, I know what I like, and it never needs to shout.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Dark wood, brushed metal, crisp cotton, structured storage, one statement piece

PICTURE IT

A sharp desk or bedroom setup with balanced shelves, good lighting, and one detail that makes the whole thing feel finished

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Order, quality, symmetry, clear surfaces, strong shapes, things that feel well made

WHAT DRAINS YOU

Visual chaos, things that fall apart fast, clutter with nowhere to go, spaces that feel unfinished

DORM VERSION

Choose matching storage, make the bed, hide the cords, and add one bold piece so the room looks decided instead of issued.

Archetype 7

The Alchemist



Inventive, resourceful, sees possibilities everywhere

You look at an ordinary object and immediately start changing it in your head. A thrift-store lamp needs a new shade. An old desk could look completely different with peel-and-stick vinyl. The awkward corner everyone ignores could become the best spot in the room. You like upcycling, mixing eras, solving problems, and making something cool out of what already exists. Your favorite compliment is, wait, you made that?

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Reclaimed wood, vintage glass, painted metal, mixed finishes, found and repurposed objects

PICTURE IT

A room where thrifted and repurposed pieces look completely original because you changed how they are used

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Thrifting, transformation, mixing old and new, creative problem-solving, seeing potential

WHAT DRAINS YOU

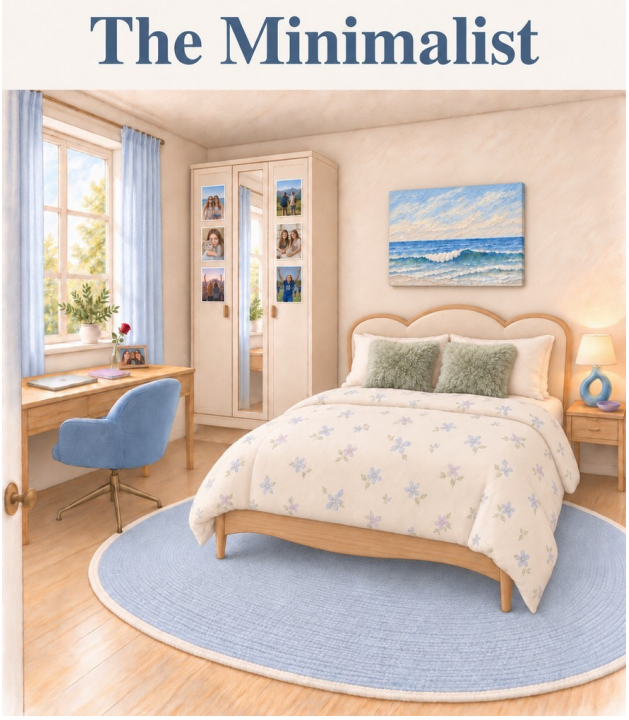
Buying everything as a matching set, waste, being told there is only one correct way to do something

DORM VERSION

Treat the ugly dorm furniture as raw material. Put peel and stick vinyl on the desk, give a thrift lamp a new shade, and turn the awkward corner into the best seat.

Archetype 8

The Minimalist



Quiet, edited, beauty in the essential

You would rather have fewer things you like than a room packed with stuff you feel neutral about. Empty space does not bother you. It helps you breathe and focus. Your room looks simple, but the details matter: the texture of the bedding, the shape of a lamp, the one print you chose instead of ten. You are not trying to own less as a competition. You just want the things around you to earn their spot.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Smooth plaster, pale cotton or linen, matte ceramic, light wood, simple glass

PICTURE IT

A calm bedroom with clean bedding, soft light, a clear nightstand, and one object you really love

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Space, quiet, simple routines, useful objects, visual breathing room

WHAT DRAINS YOU

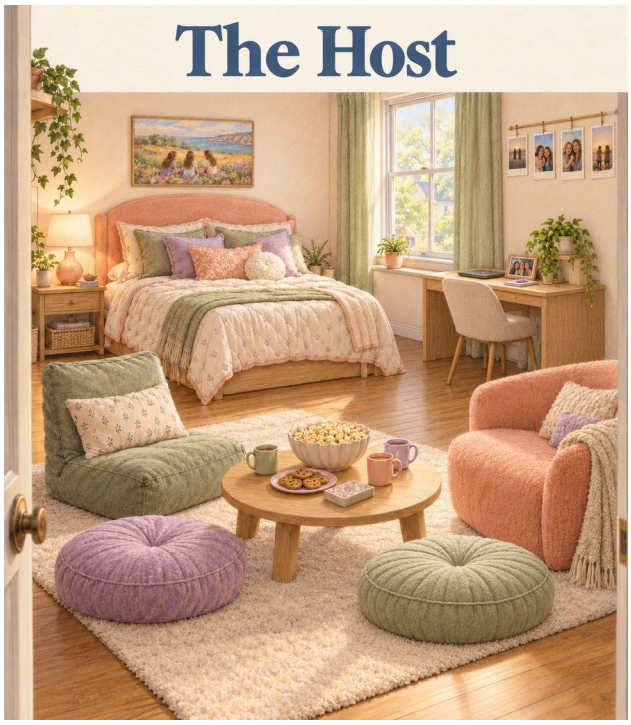
Visual noise, piles without a home, too many competing colors, decor that feels busy for no reason

DORM VERSION

Bring half of what you packed, keep the surfaces empty, and spend the money on good bedding and one lamp.

Archetype 9

The Host



Warm, social, built for connection

You think about people when you arrange a room. Is there somewhere for a friend to sit? Can everyone reach the snacks? Would a friend want to hang out here after school or stay up talking in a dorm room? You like extra pillows, movable chairs, soft lighting, and anything that makes a space less awkward to gather in. Your favorite room is usually the one where nobody is in a hurry to leave.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Soft throws, floor pillows, big cushions, warm lamps, sturdy tables, stacks of mugs

PICTURE IT

A dorm or living room with friends sitting everywhere, snacks in the middle, music on, and no formal seating chart required

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Friends, hosting, comfort, shared food, flexible seating, spaces that make people linger

WHAT DRAINS YOU

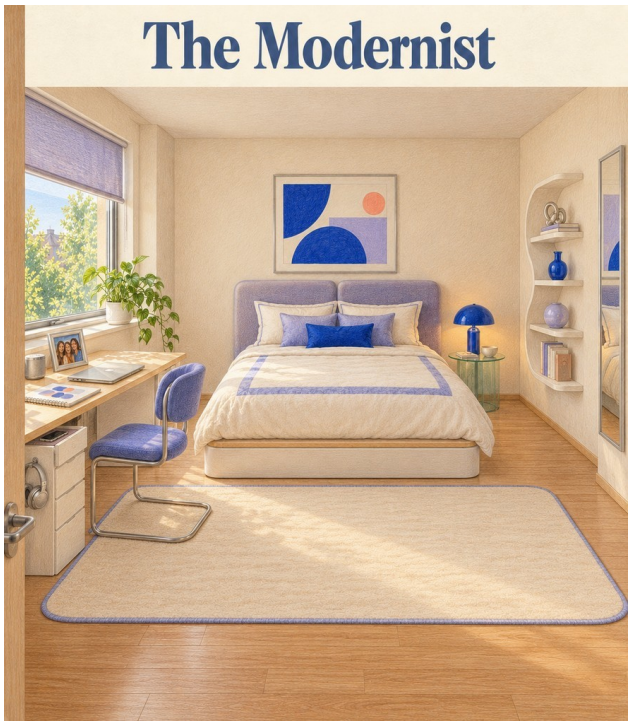
Stiff rooms, nowhere comfortable to sit, fragile setups, spaces that make everyone whisper

DORM VERSION

Keep floor cushions, a stack of mugs, and snacks within reach, and leave the door open more often than it is closed.

Archetype 10

The Modernist



Clean, current, design-aware

You like sharp lines, smart details, and things that solve a problem and still look good. Tech can be part of the design instead of a pile of cords you pretend not to see. You are drawn to rooms that feel current and uncluttered, but you still want them to be livable. A charging station hidden inside a drawer makes you weirdly happy. So does a chair that looks like sculpture but is comfortable.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Matte metal, glass, smooth wood, simple tile, clean fabrics, sculptural shapes

PICTURE IT

A clean bedroom or study setup with hidden cords, great lighting, one bold art print, and almost nothing that feels accidental

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Innovation, clean lines, useful technology, contemporary art, clever solutions

WHAT DRAINS YOU

Fussy details, clutter, fake-old finishes, too many competing objects

DORM VERSION

Set up one charging spot, clip on a lamp with warm light, hide the cords, and hang a single big print instead of six small ones.

Archetype 11

The Romantic



Soft, expressive, detail-loving

You care about how a room feels emotionally. Soft fabric, warm light, curved shapes, favorite photos, flowers or greenery, beautiful little objects, even a dramatic color can make an ordinary room feel more special. Romantic does not have to mean pink and roses. It can be deep red, vintage, moody, delicate, lush, or whatever version of beauty makes you stop and look twice. Those details matter to you, and you like living around them.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Velvet, soft cotton, flowers or greenery, ribbon, vintage-style mirrors, warm light, blush or deep jewel tones

PICTURE IT

A soft bedroom with layered bedding, warm lamps, flowers or greenery, and a mirror you found secondhand

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Beauty, softness, flowers, candlelight or warm lamps, small details, sensory comfort

WHAT DRAINS YOU

Harsh lighting, cold rooms, everything chosen only for function, spaces with no softness

DORM VERSION

Choose soft bedding in a color you love, find a secondhand mirror, hang warm string lights, and keep something alive or flowering on the desk.

Archetype 12

The Adventurer



Curious, bold, drawn to discovery

Your room collects evidence of where you have been and where your attention goes. That could mean travel, but it could also be concerts, day trips, family stories, maps, postcards, museum tickets, thrift finds, books, or places you hope to see someday. You like objects with a real story and you are not interested in making every influence match. The important part is knowing what something means and where it came from. A whole culture is never a decorating theme.

SIGNATURE TEXTURES

Travel photos, maps, postcards, woven baskets, sturdy canvas or leather, handmade pieces with a known story

PICTURE IT

A room with a pin-covered map, photos from trips or day adventures, a few meaningful finds, and a shelf of things that make you want to go somewhere

WHAT FEEDS YOU

Travel, curiosity, craft, stories, new places, learning where things come from

WHAT DRAINS YOU

Rooms with no story, copy-and-paste decor, objects chosen only because they look 'worldly'

DORM VERSION

Hang a map with pins and photos from everywhere you have been, and keep one object from home that tells a story when someone asks.

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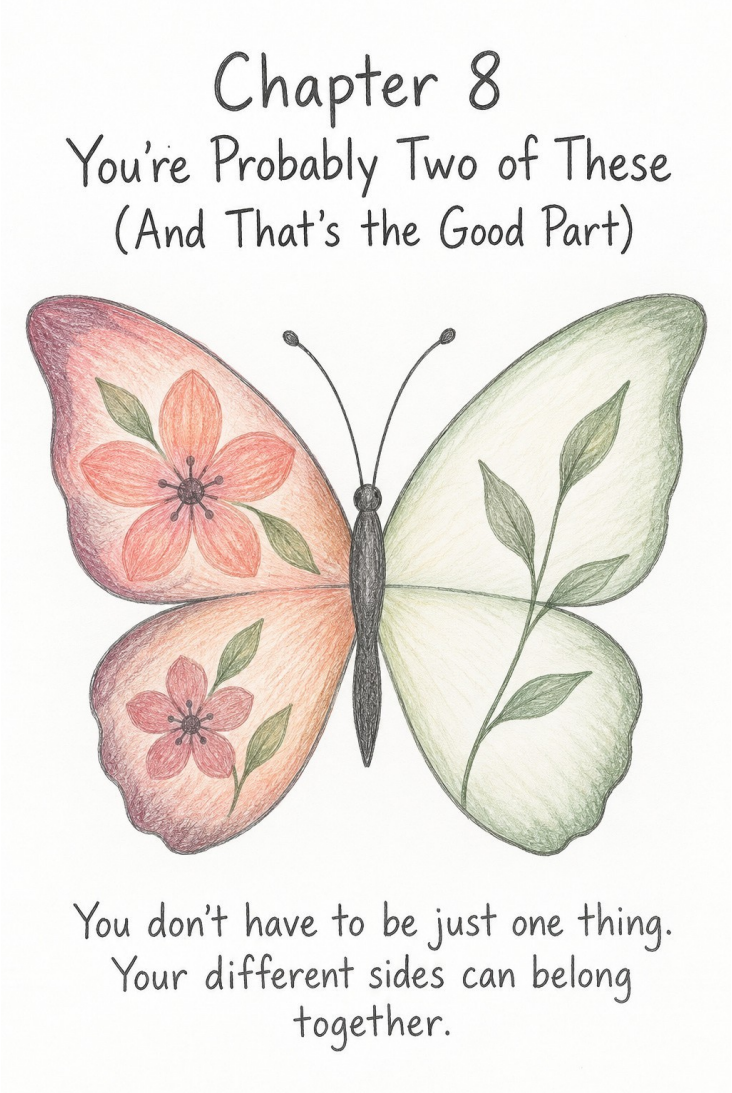
Which one did you keep thinking about after you finished reading?

Maybe one was obvious. Maybe you read Wildflower and thought, yep, that explains a lot. Or maybe three different descriptions had lines that felt weirdly specific to you.

You do not have to solve yourself in one chapter. The archetypes are useful only if they help you see patterns you already have.

An Icon-Romantic can look completely different from an Icon-Modernist. A Wildflower-Minimalist sounds contradictory until you imagine someone who loves color but hates clutter.

That is where blends get interesting.



If more than one archetype fit, that is a good sign. You are a person, not a paint sample.

I use a primary and secondary archetype as shorthand for organizing a blend, and nothing more scientific than that. Your primary is the one that explains the biggest pattern. Your secondary catches something the first one misses. You do not have to force yourself into exactly two if that does not help.

Two people can choose the same primary and still design completely differently because the second layer changes the mood, the details, and what they care about most.

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Why Two Is More Interesting Than One

Think of it like music. A single note gives you information. A chord gives you more texture. Your primary archetype is the note you hear first, and your secondary changes the way the whole thing sounds.

An Icon-Romantic wants a room that feels polished but still soft: an organized desk, symmetrical shelves, velvet pillows, warm lighting. An Icon-Modernist keeps the same sense of order but chooses cleaner lines, hidden cords, and sharper shapes. They start in the same place and end up with very different rooms.

That makes the blend more useful to me than a single label. It adds nuance instead of pretending one word can explain your whole taste.

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How to Find Your Primary

Your primary is usually the archetype you keep returning to because it explains more of your choices than the others do. Maybe you recognized your room, your saved posts, your clothes, or even the stuff you loved when you were little.

If you are still unsure, imagine a room that is completely yours. Ignore budget, dorm rules, roommates, and whether anyone else would approve for one minute. How would you want it to feel when you walk in? Calm? Alive? Cozy? Clear? Dramatic? Social? The archetype that best matches that feeling is a good place to start, and you can change your mind later.

The 'What Drains You' sections can help too. Sometimes it is easier to spot what makes you want to leave a room than what makes you want to stay. Just do not turn that into a formula. Hating clutter does not automatically make you a Minimalist.

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How to Find Your Secondary

Your secondary is often the archetype that explains the details your primary leaves out.

A few ways to look for it:

Compare how you dress when you are going out, going to school, or just hanging around at home. Are there two different sides of your taste showing up? One might be cleaner, louder, softer, stranger, or more relaxed than the other.

Look at what you keep saving or screenshotting. Maybe your room is mostly Homebody, but every image you save has one dramatic Romantic detail. That repeated little pull is worth noticing.

Then go back to the childhood exercise from Chapter 2. Sometimes the second archetype is hiding in the things you loved before you started worrying whether they were cool.

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When Your Two Sides Disagree

Some blends fit together easily. Homebody + Host, for example, both care about warmth, comfort, and making people feel welcome.

Other pairings pull in opposite directions, which can be much more interesting than a perfectly matched set.

Wildflower + Minimalist sounds impossible at first. One loves color and layers. The other needs breathing room. Put them together and you might get white walls, one bright quilt, a few plants, and almost nothing else. That is color without chaos.

Mystic + Modernist means a calm desk with clean lines, a low warm lamp, and one object that has real meaning. Adventurer + Romantic gives you travel photos and collected objects, displayed with soft fabric, flowers, and warm light instead of filling every surface.

If your two archetypes disagree, you do not have to make one win. The useful question is what each side is asking for.

One might want stimulation while the other wants calm. One might love collecting while the other hates clutter. Your room can make space for both.

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Six Blend Examples

Here are six combinations I like because you can see how one archetype changes the other:

Visionary + Minimalist: bright, open, and edited. Think great daylight, a clear desk, a few smart pieces, and almost no visual noise.

Homebody + Romantic is earthy but soft: warm wood, cotton or linen, flowers, vintage details, and lighting that makes the room feel cozy at night.

Collector + Adventurer: a room built from stories. Photos, books, tickets, maps, family objects, and a few collected pieces that mean something.

Icon + Alchemist: organized but unexpected. A clean layout with one thrifted chair you repainted, a bold lamp, or a weird object that somehow becomes the best thing in the room.

Wildflower + Host feels colorful, relaxed, and ready for friends: floor pillows, plants, blankets, music, snacks, and seating that can move when more people show up.

Mystic + Homebody is quiet and tactile: warm wood, a soft rug, low light, a journal, a plant, and a few objects that help the room feel calm and personal.

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What About Three?

If three archetypes fit, three fit. There is no reason to demote one just to make the framework neat. If it helps, you can think of one as your primary, one as your secondary, and one as an influence that shows up in certain parts of your life.

For example, maybe Collector describes your room, Adventurer describes what you collect, and Host shows up whenever friends come over. That is not a problem with the framework. That is just you being more complicated than a quiz result.

Use the archetypes loosely. Keep what helps you see something real and drop what does not.

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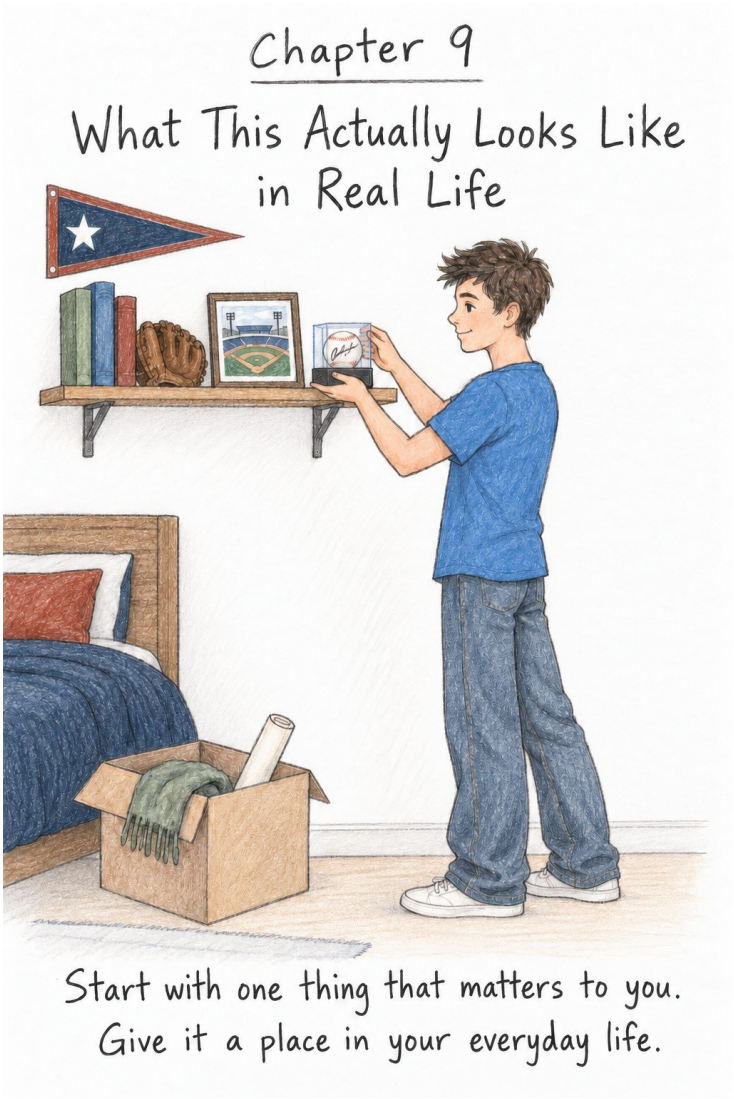
Your Blend Is Where It Gets Interesting

The best part of a blend is that it gives you more room to be specific.

Your history, budget, culture, family, sensory preferences, interests, and what your life looks like right now all change how an archetype shows up. Living with family, sharing a dorm, renting your first apartment, or having a room completely to yourself can produce four very different versions of the same blend.

Style labels describe a look. The archetypes are meant to prompt better questions about why you like that look and what you need from it. Your blend is vocabulary. Nobody is handing you an identity certificate.

Write down one or two archetypes that feel useful right now. Pencil is better than permanent marker. Next, answer the three roommate questions in Chapter 9 for yourself, even if you live alone: what do I need this room to do, what makes me crazy, and which corner is mine. Pick one experiment from Chapter 23 that fits your primary and live with it for a week. Then decide whether the archetype was right, or whether you were. Either answer teaches you something, and both of them can change. In the next chapter, we will test the framework with a few made-up scenarios and see what can change when the design starts with the person instead of the trend.



Theory is useful, but examples are where this starts to click. I'm 17. I don't have years of client makeovers to show you, and I'm not going to pretend I do. So the three stories in this chapter are made-up scenarios based on ideas I kept noticing while researching this book, experimenting with my own spaces, and helping friends and family think through theirs.

They are examples, not case studies or proof that changing a room changes your whole life. Once you have language for what you like and what you need, design choices can get a lot easier.

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Maya: The Wildflower in a Gray Box

Maya is nineteen and moving into her first off-campus apartment with two friends. Her bedroom is small, the walls are rental white, and almost everything she owns either came from home or from a rushed move-in shopping trip. She wants the room to look grown-up, so she copies the safest inspiration she can find: beige bedding, a plain lamp, one neutral print, done.

It looks perfectly fine. It also feels like a room she could have walked into anywhere. Nothing in it is wrong, but almost nothing in it says Maya.

When Maya reads through the archetypes, Wildflower is the one she keeps circling. That surprises her because the room she just created is basically the opposite: careful, neutral, and trying very hard not to be embarrassing.

Then she thinks about what she likes when nobody is grading the room. She likes bright color, plants, handmade things, tiny thrift-store finds, the drawings she makes herself, and the woven bag her aunt gave her. Her favorite room growing up was never perfectly coordinated, but it was full of things she cared about.

She does not throw everything out. She changes the bed first, adding a colorful secondhand quilt and one pillow she loves. She frames two of her own drawings. A friend gives her a plant cutting. She finds a small side table at a thrift store and paints it instead of buying a new one.

The room still has white rental walls and inexpensive furniture. It just feels more like her. Maya wants to spend time there now, and when friends come over, they have things to ask about because the room finally gives them clues about who lives there.

Nothing magical happened. Her grades did not jump because she bought a quilt. She simply stopped treating ‘grown-up’ as another word for ‘generic.’

For Maya, Wildflower was useful because it gave her permission to choose what she already liked.

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James: The Collector Who Thought Design Wasn't for Him

James is twenty and sharing an apartment near campus. His room is functional: bed, desk, laundry basket, charging cables, and a blank wall he keeps meaning to do something with. He has never thought of himself as a design person, and honestly, he is not sure why anyone would spend this much time thinking about a room.

Somewhere along the way, James also got the message that caring about interiors was not really a guy thing. So if something worked, he figured that was enough.

But James keeps things. He has concert tickets, a tiny ceramic dish from a family trip, film photos he took with friends, a soccer scarf, and a battered paperback his grandfather gave him. None of it is expensive, but he can tell you exactly why he kept every piece.

The Collector catches his attention because the description makes him realize that he already cares about objects with stories. He has just never thought of that as design, and he does not suddenly need a perfectly styled apartment to make the idea useful.

He clears one shelf and puts a few of those things where he can see them. He frames two photos instead of leaving them in his camera roll. He hangs the soccer scarf neatly rather than stuffing it in a drawer.

The room is still simple. It is also suddenly specific. A friend walks in and says, ‘Okay, this looks like you,’ which James finds funny because he barely bought anything.

That is the point. His room did not need more stuff. It needed evidence of him.

The Collector lens gives James a way to make choices, and he never has to become someone who spends Saturday comparing throw pillows. He keeps what has meaning, displays some of it well, and ignores the internet’s endless advice about what his room is supposed to look like.

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Priya and Alex: Two Archetypes, One Home

Priya and Alex are college roommates moving into their first apartment after a year in dorms. Priya leans Homebody: warm wood, soft texture, plants, calm colors. Alex leans Adventurer: bolder color, maps, postcards, photos, thrifted pieces, and objects connected to places or experiences that matter to them.

At first, they each keep suggesting things the other one does not want. Priya thinks Alex’s ideas will make the living room too busy. Alex thinks Priya’s version looks nice but a little too quiet. Their first attempts at compromise mostly produce a pile of ‘fine’ choices neither of them is excited about.

The archetypes give them a less annoying way to talk about it. Instead of debating whether a lamp is objectively good, they talk about what they want the shared room to do. Priya wants somewhere she can come home and decompress. Alex wants a room that feels social, curious, and full of stories.

They realize those needs are not opposites. They keep the larger pieces simple, add warm lighting and a couple of plants for Priya, then use art, a colorful chair, and a few meaningful objects to bring in Alex’s side. They also give each person one small area to arrange however they want, which turns out to be much easier than negotiating every single object.

The result is not a perfect fifty-fifty split. It is a room that feels calm enough for Priya and interesting enough for Alex. More importantly, they can explain why they made the choices they made.

A shared room cannot solve roommate problems, but talking about needs before buying things can prevent at least a few unnecessary arguments about whose taste is ‘right.’

That is what I like about blends in shared spaces. Nobody has to win. A good result gives both people enough of themselves to recognize the room as theirs.

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Three Questions to Ask a Roommate Before You Buy Anything

If you are about to share a room with someone, borrow Priya and Alex's trick before the first shopping trip. Each of you answers three questions, out loud or in the group chat.

One: What do you need this room to do for you? You might need to sleep, study, host, hide, or recover. Be specific. 'I need to be able to fall asleep by midnight with a lamp on' is more useful than 'cozy.'

Two: What makes you crazy? It might be dishes, noise, clutter, overhead lights, cold rooms, or people sitting on your bed. Say it now, kindly, instead of in week six, loudly.

Three: Which corner is yours alone? Give each person one zone the other does not get a vote on. The rest of the room is shared and negotiated. A lot of roommate fights about taste are really fights about territory.

Then compare archetypes. You do not need to match. You need a way to say 'I am a Minimalist and you are a Wildflower, so let's keep the big stuff simple and let your side go loud' without anyone being wrong.

In real life, the questions sound like this. 'I need the overhead light off after ten.' 'I need it on until I finish my reading.' 'Then you need a lamp.' 'I don't own a lamp.' 'Then that is what we buy first.' That is five lines, one purchase, and zero resentment.

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What All Three Stories Have in Common

These three scenarios are different, but they share the same idea: the archetype is not doing the designing for anyone. It helps each person see what they respond to, what they need from the space, and which choices feel worth making.

A room will not fix your life. But a room that feels like you can be easier to live, study, rest, create, and hang out in than one you copied without ever asking why you liked it.

So far, we have used the archetypes mostly to talk about rooms. But while I was working on this framework, I kept noticing the same questions showing up in other places too: clothes, desks, playlists, routines, even what we choose to share online.

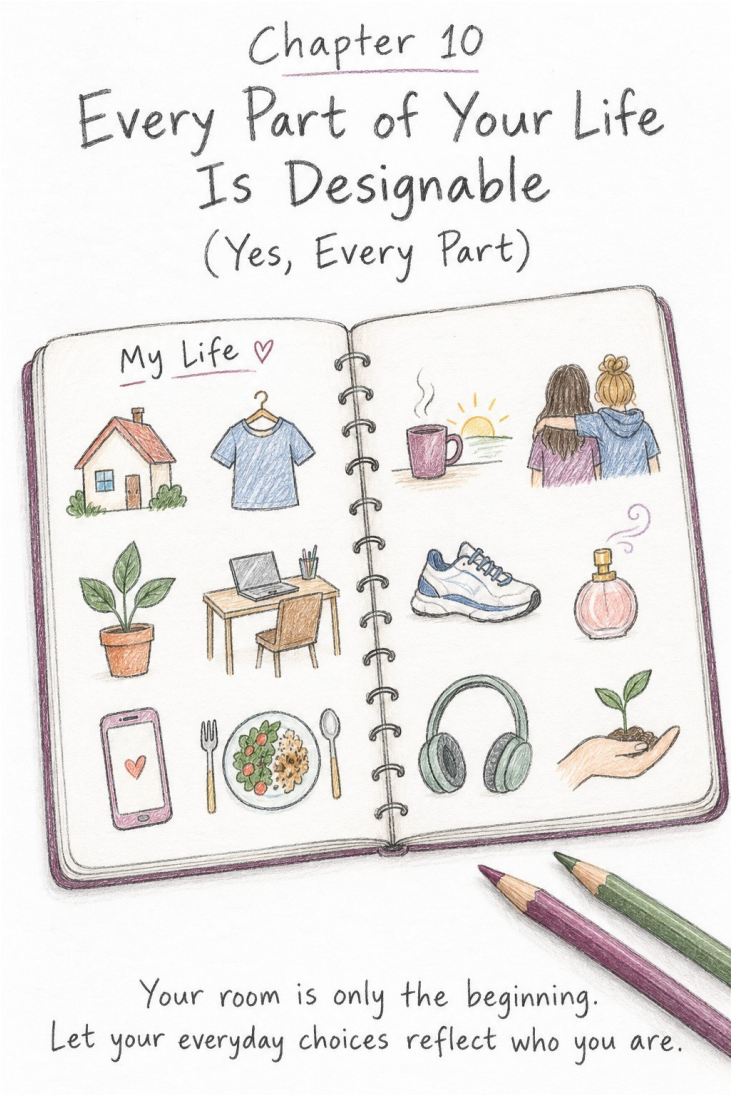
That is where Part Three goes next. I organized those areas into twelve dimensions, not because twelve is a magic number, but because it gave me a useful map for looking at the different environments we move through every day.

Home is just the beginning.

PART THREE

The 12 Dimensions

Design Isn't Just Your Living Room



When I say design, I do not just mean furniture. I mean the choices around you that you can shape: what you wear, what is on your desk, how your phone screen looks, what music is playing, where your backpack lands when you walk in, and whether your room makes it easy or impossible to find your keys in the morning.

Some of those choices are visual. Some are practical. Some are sensory. A lot of them happen so automatically that we stop noticing they are choices at all.

For this book, I use the word design pretty broadly: arranging the things around you so they support the way you want to live. ‘Designable’ does not mean you control everything. You obviously do not. It just means there may be a choice, even a small one, that is worth noticing.

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The 12 Dimensions

I organized the next twelve chapters into what I call the 12 Dimensions of Design. This is my way of making the ideas easier to use, not a scientific model or a rule that says life has exactly twelve parts.

Here is the map:

1. Your Home - the room, dorm, apartment, or house where you live, and how it supports rest, focus, privacy, and connection

2. Your Wardrobe - what you wear, what you reach for, and how your clothes can feel more like you

3. Your Garden - your connection to plants and nature, whether that means a yard, a balcony, a windowsill, or one plant you are trying very hard not to kill

4. Your Workspace - the place where you study, work, make things, or get through homework, and what helps you focus there

5. Your Digital Presence - what represents you online, from social media and portfolios to the tiny choices that make a digital space feel like yours

6. Your Table - the everyday experience around food, even if ‘your table’ is a dorm desk, a kitchen counter, or takeout with friends

7. Your Rituals - the small routines that help a day feel less chaotic, from what you do when you wake up to how you wind down

8. Your People - not designing other people, obviously, but thinking about the spaces and habits that make connection easier with friends, family, teammates, classmates, roommates, and coworkers

9. Your Movement - how you like to move your body and what makes that easier, more comfortable, or more enjoyable

10. Your Scent - fragrance, fresh air, laundry, candles, food, and all the smells that quietly change how a space feels

11. Your Sound - music, silence, notifications, traffic, voices, and the background noise of everyday life

12. Your Legacy - what you make, share, teach, care for, or pass on, even in small ways. Legacy starts long before eighty

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Why Twelve?

There is no magic reason for twelve. I tried grouping the ideas in different ways while I was working on the book, and twelve gave each area enough room before the list turned into fifty-seven microscopic categories.

Making every dimension match perfectly would be exhausting. I care more about whether different parts of your life feel like they belong to the same person: you.

Your archetype can be one clue, but it is not the only one. Your culture, budget, sensory preferences, schedule, family, hobbies, living situation, and what your days look like right now matter just as much. A nineteen-year-old Homebody in a dorm is going to design very differently from a Homebody with their own apartment, and both can make sense.

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How to Use These Chapters

You do not have to read these chapters in order, and you definitely do not have to redo twelve parts of your life at once. Please do not turn this book into a twelve-tab improvement project.

Start with the dimension you keep noticing. Maybe getting dressed has become weirdly stressful. Maybe your desk is so visually loud that you avoid sitting there. Maybe your phone still has a lock screen, apps, and photos from three completely different phases of your life. Start there.

Each chapter explains what came up while I researched that dimension, how the archetypes might show up there, and a few experiments you can try with the life and the budget you already have. Treat the suggestions as ideas. None of them is homework.

Some chapters will feel immediately useful. Others might not fit you at all right now. Skip them. Come back later. The framework is supposed to make you more observant, and the last thing I want is to hand you twelve new ways to feel behind.

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One Small Change Can Make the Next One Easier

I see this in my own spaces: once I fix one thing that has been bothering me, the next choice becomes clearer. If I clean up my desk and make it easier to work there, the chaos on my laptop desktop becomes harder to ignore. If I organize what I wear, I am usually less tempted by random clothes that only looked good on somebody else.

One redesigned corner does not start a magical chain reaction. Paying attention just gets easier with practice. Once you know what ‘this feels more like me’ feels like, you have a better reference point for the next decision.

You build that slowly, one shelf, playlist, outfit, routine, or screen at a time.

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A Note on Budget

Twelve dimensions can sound like twelve opportunities to spend money. That is not what I mean.

A lot of the best changes are free: move something, remove something, borrow something, trade with a friend, use what you already own differently, or stop keeping something visible just because it has always been there.

When you do buy something, buying more is not the assignment. Know why you are choosing it. Thrift stores, swaps, hand-me-downs, secondhand apps, and DIY fixes can be more personal than buying a whole matching set anyway.

The twelve dimensions are not shopping lists. They are twelve places to pay attention.

Let’s start with the most obvious one: home.

Chapter 11
Your Home



Home is the dimension everyone expects in a design book, but I think we usually start in the wrong place. We jump to paint colors, bedding, furniture, or whatever room is blowing up online. I think the better place to start is simpler: how do you want the space to feel when you walk in?

That could mean your bedroom at home, a dorm, a first apartment, or one room you share with other people. It is where you study, scroll, get ready, crash after a long day, have friends over, and try to reset. A space cannot fix your life, obviously, but it can make some of those things easier or harder depending on how it is set up.

So this chapter is less about making a room look impressive and more about making it work for the person who lives there.

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What Do You Need This Room to Do?

Before we talk about furniture and color palettes, I want to talk about function, and I do not just mean whether a desk fits or how many people can sit somewhere. I mean emotional function. What do you want this space to help you feel or do?

For a Homebody, home has to feel warm, soft, and safe enough to exhale. Adventurers want reminders of places, experiences, and plans that make life feel bigger. A Minimalist is happiest with visual breathing room and only a few things they really love. Those are different needs, so the rooms should not end up looking the same.

I would not treat those as rules. The archetypes are clues. What matters is figuring out what consistently helps you feel comfortable, focused, energized, or calm, and what keeps getting in the way.

So instead of asking, what should my room look like, try asking: what do I need this room to do for me? Write down a few words before you buy anything. Calm. Focused. Creative. Welcoming. Private. Whatever feels true to you.

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The Five Layers of Home Design

I made myself a five-layer checklist for looking at a room because otherwise it is really easy to get distracted by the cute stuff first. It is not an official design formula. It is just a way to check whether the room works before you start decorating it.

The first layer is layout. Where is the bed, desk, chair, storage, and open space? Can you move through the room without bumping into things? Can you study without staring at your laundry pile? Can two friends sit somewhere without one of them ending up on the floor? A Host will set up the room to make conversation easy. Open sight lines come first for a Visionary. A Mystic needs one quiet corner that feels a little separate. Start with how you really use the room, and ignore how a furniture ad says you should.

The second layer is what you see: color, furniture, art, and the objects you choose to leave out. This is where your archetype becomes visible. A Romantic cannot resist softness and richer color. You can count on a Modernist to keep the shapes cleaner and the palette more edited. A Wildflower is the one who mixes color and pattern in a way that feels personal instead of perfectly matched.

The third layer is texture. This is one of those things I did not think much about until I started paying closer attention. A room with only hard, flat surfaces can feel very different from one with linen, wood, a fuzzy pillow, woven storage, or a soft blanket. A Homebody loves natural materials. An Icon is drawn to whatever feels more polished and substantial. An Alchemist lives for the contrast of rough next to smooth or matte next to shine.

The fourth layer is scent. We will get into this more later, but smell is part of how a place feels. Not every archetype needs a signature candle. It can be clean sheets, an open

window, fresh herbs, or a scent you already associate with home. If you share a room, check with the other person first. If fragrance gives you a headache or your dorm does not allow candles, skip it. Scent-free is still a design choice.

The fifth layer is light. This one can change a room fast. When I started reading about light and sleep, it made me pay much more attention to the difference between bright daytime light and what I use at night. Natural light, harsh overhead lighting, a warm bedside lamp, and tiny string lights all create different experiences. Pay attention to when you like your room most. If it feels great in daylight and awful after dark, experiment with the lighting before deciding the whole room is wrong.

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The Numbers I Use in My Own Room

Most of this book is about noticing, so here is some technique. These are the numbers I use in my own room. A few came from the time I spent in an interior designer's office, watching what happened behind the scenes and trying to be useful, and the rest came from measuring things with a tape and a phone app until they felt right.

Hang art so the center of the piece sits about 57 inches from the floor. That is roughly eye level for a standing person, and it is one reason the rooms you like tend to look calmer than rooms where everything is hung too high.

A rug should be big enough that the front legs of the furniture sit on it. A small rug floating in the middle of the floor is supposed to look cozy, and it makes the room look smaller.

Try for three light sources in a room: the overhead, a lamp for the desk, and a lamp for the bed. Two is fine in a dorm. One is why the room feels like a waiting room.

When you are sitting, the bottom of a lamp shade should be about at eye level. Any higher and you see the bulb, and any lower and you lose the light.

Leave at least two feet of clear walkway, including the path from the bed to the door in the dark.

Hang curtains high and wide, a few inches above the window and past its edges. The window looks bigger and the room looks taller, and it costs nothing extra.

If you can see a window from a mirror, you get the daylight twice.

None of these are laws. They are the places I start, and they save me from moving the same shelf four times.

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How to Pick a Color You Will Not Hate in a Month

I told you in the introduction that I was not going to name the correct shade of white. I still won't. But I can tell you how I choose a color, because the method matters more than the color.

Start from something you already own and love. It could be a blanket, a jacket, a book cover, or a mug. If you have kept it and reached for it for a year, the color has already passed a test that a paint chip has not.

Test it on paper, in the room, before you commit. Tape a sample on the wall and look at it in the morning with the blinds open, then at night under your lamp. Colors change more between those two moments than between two paint brands.

Never choose a color from a phone screen. Screens are lit from behind, and your wall is not.

Pick the second most exciting option. The most exciting one is the one you will be tired of by spring.

If you cannot paint, which covers most dorms and rentals, bring the color in through things that leave with you: bedding, a rug, a curtain, a lamp shade, or art. A rented white box with one color you chose on purpose reads as a decision. A rented white box with eight colors reads as a move in progress.

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Using Your Archetype at Home

I am not going to give you a shopping list for each archetype because that would defeat the idea. The archetype is supposed to help you understand your preferences. Copying a room skips that step.

One way to use a blend is to let one archetype guide the overall feeling and let another show up in smaller details. An Icon with a Romantic secondary, for example, goes for a room that feels clean and put together but still has one soft throw, a richer color, or flowers on the desk.

A Wildflower with a Collector secondary wants more color and collected objects, but the Collector side still cares about where everything goes and why it is there. The shelf can be eclectic and still make sense. The art can be varied, and it still should not look like five unrelated ideas collided.

Two people can even choose the same primary archetype and end up with completely different rooms. A quiet reading or meditation corner is the signature of a Homebody with a Mystic influence. A Homebody with a Host influence thinks first about an extra chair, a floor cushion, or a place where friends naturally end up talking.

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Where Your Family Is From Belongs in the Room

The Adventurer description warns against treating a whole culture like a decorating theme. I want to say the opposite thing too, because it matters just as much: where your family is from, and where you have lived, belongs in your room, as itself.

My family is partly Brazilian, and I lived there when I was little. At my house that still shows up as the cheese bread, the soccer on the TV, the music, and a language I am trying to get back. None of it is decor. It is what is there, and a room without any of it would be missing something about me. If your family has a food, a fabric, an object, a saint, a photo, a recipe card, or a word on the wall, it goes in because it is yours. Whether it looks interesting to someone else has nothing to do with it.

The difference between heritage and a theme is whether you can explain why the thing is in the room. If the answer is a person or a place you are connected to, it belongs. If the answer is a mood board, it is a theme.

Where you have been goes in the same way. I have an adventurous streak and I love to travel. I have watched the Women's World Cup in Paris, spent six weeks in Bali living inside a culture very different from mine, seen the Aboriginal cultures near Uluru (Ayers Rock) and the big city life of Sydney, walked through Mayan ruins in Mexico, and been to Hawaii more times than I can count, where the culture is as much a part of the trip as the beach. Japan is next year. My senior trip starts in Barcelona, where I am looking forward to seeing Gaudí's buildings in person, because his style is unlike anything else in design. A designer that singular is the best argument I know for having a style of your own. From every place I keep one small thing, nothing expensive, to remind me of the adventure. Those objects belong in my room for the same reason the cheese bread belongs in my kitchen: I can tell you exactly why each one is there.

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If Rooms Hit You Harder

Some people barely notice a flickering light and a noisy hallway. For others, those two things make concentrating miserable. If that sounds like you, treat it as a design brief, because the right lighting and quiet can make the room much easier to live in.

Use softer, warmer light that you control from the bed, and use a lamp instead of the overhead, always. Keep earplugs, a fan, or a white noise track ready for the hallway. Choose bedding and clothes in textures you can stand, which might mean no tags and nothing scratchy. Keep one corner with less in it, where your eyes can rest. Have a door that closes, and agree on a signal with the people you live with that means closed is closed.

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Dorms, Rentals, and Rooms You Can't Renovate

A lot of readers are in bedrooms at home, dorms, shared apartments, or rentals where painting walls and changing floors is not an option. That does not make design pointless. It just means you work with what you can control.

The smallest room I have ever had was that storage closet under the stairs at my mom's place, the year my parents divorced. Nobody was using it, so I claimed it, and my family started calling it my Harry Potter room. The ceiling sloped, the furniture options were

basically one desk and one idea, and nothing about it looked like a room tour. I slept in my mom's room, and the closet got everything else: the desk, the drawings, the objects with a story, and a lamp in the one spot that made the low ceiling feel cozy instead of cramped. I slept in there exactly once, because my mom did not want people thinking her kid slept in the storage closet, which is fair. When my brother moved out, I got his room too, and I kept the closet anyway. It was still one of my favorite rooms, and it taught me that a space does not need square footage, or even a bed, to feel like yours. It needs decisions.

Bedding, curtains, removable hooks, lighting, storage, art, and the way furniture is arranged can do a lot, and none of it is permanent. Check your dorm or lease rules before hanging, painting, or lighting anything. Some of the best fixes are free: moving the desk toward better light, clearing one overloaded surface, rotating art you already own, or trading something with a friend. If you do spend money, start with the thing that solves an actual problem instead of buying five decorations because they look good together online.

Renting does not keep a space from feeling like yours. A few choices that reflect how you live can be enough.

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Furnishing a Room for Almost Nothing

A lot of what you need is sitting in someone else's room, waiting to be given away.

Every school has a free and for sale group, usually a group chat or a page, and it is busiest in the first two weeks and the last two weeks of the year. In May, people leaving dorms get rid of lamps, rugs, mini fridges, and shelves they cannot carry home, and some schools run an official swap while others just have a curb. Buy Nothing groups and neighborhood groups give away furniture, plants, and curtains, from people who would rather hand something to a student than haul it to the dump. Thrift stores near campus, the as is corner at the big furniture stores, and resale apps are good for the one thing you are looking for specifically. Your own house counts too: the lamp in the hallway nobody uses, the rug in the garage, or the chair in the room your older sibling moved out of. Ask before you take it.

Set one rule before you start: bring something in only if it solves a problem or makes you happy to look at. A free object still takes up space.

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Two Boxes and the First 48 Hours

If you are packing for a move, sort the things that matter into two boxes before anything else goes in the car.

Box one makes the room work. It holds a lamp you like, because the overhead light is never flattering, plus an extension cord and a power strip, removable hooks, bedding you chose in a color you like, a small bin or basket for the stuff that otherwise ends up on the floor, a tray for the desk, and a towel that is not sad. You know the sad towel. You have probably owned the sad towel.

Box two makes the room yours. It holds three objects that have a story, one photo you want to see from bed, one thing you made or that someone made for you, and something from home that smells like home. If you are a plant person, it holds the plant. If you are not, do not bring a plant.

Everything else can be figured out after you get there. If the two boxes make it into the room on day one, you are already ahead of half the hallway in week four.

Before you go to a single welcome event, do four things. Fix the light: turn off the overhead, plug in your lamp, and look at the room again, because this alone changes about half of how a room feels. Make the bed with your own bedding, because it is the biggest surface in a small room, which means it is most of what you see. Put one personal object where you can see it from the pillow, because that is what your eyes will land on when you wake up confused about where you are. Clear one spot where another person can sit that is not your bed, because rooms with nowhere to sit stay empty.

That is it. Posters can wait. Matching bins can wait. The bins are not going anywhere. Forty eight hours of the room doing its job will tell you more about what it needs than any shopping list.

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Where to Start Right Now

If this chapter makes you want to redo everything in one weekend, resist the urge to turn it into a shopping mission. A room usually gets more personal when you make a few choices, live with them, and see what works.

Start with one space, even if that space is just your side of a dorm room. Then ask yourself three questions.

First: what do I need this space to help me do or feel? Maybe your bedroom needs to help you settle down at night and get out the door in the morning with everything you need. Maybe your desk needs to make studying less distracting. Maybe your first apartment needs one small area where friends can sit without everyone balancing a plate on their lap.

Second: what is fighting that feeling right now? Maybe the overhead light is too harsh. Maybe the chair has become permanent clothing storage. Maybe you have so much stuff on your desk that there is barely room for a laptop. Maybe the bedding is fine, but it feels like something you picked because it was on sale, and love had nothing to do with it.

In my case, the thing fighting my room weighs twelve pounds. My dog Omi is a Biewer terrier with a shoe fetish. He takes my shoes, hides them under my bed, and then does everything in his power to keep me from taking them back. I think he believes in finders keepers. It does force me to keep my shoes off the floor and my room more organized, because this twelve pound dog has strong opinions about feathering his nest with my stuff. Not every force that shapes a room is a design choice. Some of them have four legs.

Third: what is one thing I can change this week? Move the lamp. Clear the chair. Swap the pillowcase. Frame something you made. Thrift one small piece you really like. The change does not have to be expensive to tell you something useful about your taste.

Then live with it for a few days and see what changed. That feedback is more useful than copying a perfect room online because it is coming from your actual life.

Here is the budget version of this chapter. For free, move the desk toward the window, clear the chair, rotate the art you already own, or wash the bedding. For under $20, buy a warm bulb for the lamp you have, a pack of removable hooks, a secondhand lamp, or a thrifted frame. If you save for one thing, make it a mattress topper or a real rug, because those are the two things you touch every single day.

Your room does not need to look like a showroom. It should look like somebody specific lives there. Ideally, that somebody is you.



You get dressed every day, which means clothes are one of the easiest places to see design identity in real life. Even if you swear you do not care about fashion, you still have preferences. You know which sweatshirt you reach for constantly, which jeans somehow make everything easier, and which thing in your closet you keep avoiding for no logical reason.

Clothes also leave the house with you. They go to class, work, practice, coffee, dates, interviews, parties, family dinners, and random errands when you run into somebody you did not expect to see. They are not your identity, but they can either feel like you or make you spend the whole day adjusting yourself.

Getting dressed also should not feel like a daily puzzle. If your closet is full but you keep reaching for the same five things, that is useful information. It probably means those five are doing something the rest of the closet is not.

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Why Your Closet Is Full and You Have Nothing to Wear

A packed closet with 'nothing to wear' is such a common problem because owning more clothes does not automatically give you more clothes you like wearing. A lot of us end up with a mix of sale purchases, trend experiments, gifts, old favorites, school-event outfits, things bought for one specific occasion, and pieces that looked better online than they do at 7:30 in the morning.

The pattern is not always the same, but one question helps: did I choose this because I really like it, or because I thought I was supposed to? Maybe you bought a blazer for an internship and never feel like yourself in it. Maybe your feed convinced you that your whole closet should be neutral even though the pieces you love most are bright. Maybe you keep buying tiny tops because they look cute on other people and then choose the same oversized sweatshirt every time you leave the house.

That mismatch can make a closet feel weirdly disconnected. Do not force every item into one archetype. Pay attention to what you reach for, what you avoid, and what those patterns say about your taste.

You are not trying to invent a new person. You are trying to see the person who is already getting dressed.

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Clothes as a Hiding Place

There is one more reason a closet can stop feeling like you, and I know it from the inside. Clothes can be a costume, a uniform, or a hiding place.

In seventh grade, mine were a hiding place. I came back to school in person after a long stretch of online classes, and I wore the biggest sweatshirts I owned, every day, no matter the weather. They were not a style choice. They were a wall. Under them was the back brace I mentioned in the introduction, and I did not want anyone to notice it, so I decided the safest plan was to give people as little to look at as possible.

It worked, sort of. It also meant I spent a year dressed as nobody in particular, and I was tired all the time from the effort of being unnoticeable. The clothes did not make me feel safer. They made me feel hidden, which turned out to be a different thing.

I still love an oversized sweatshirt. I own several. The question is why I reach for one. Comfort is a great reason. Fear of being seen is a reason too, but it is one you can outgrow, and you get to decide when.

In eighth grade, I tried the opposite. I found boxes of clothes my mom had worn in her thirties, with designer labels, real color, and more personality than anything in my closet. For about three months I wore a different outfit practically every day. Putting them together was the fun part. I liked the puzzle of figuring out what went with what, and I still like that puzzle now.

People noticed. That was sort of the point, and for a while it worked the way I hoped. New friends appeared, and after seventh grade, that felt like winning. It did not last. The friendships that showed up for the outfits left with the outfits, and standing out that much turned out to be its own problem. The part I only understood later is that if I had been handed the money to buy forty new outfits myself, I would not have bought those. They were my mom's taste, borrowed. They made a great costume, but a costume is still a costume.

So I have been on both ends. The sweatshirts were me hiding. The designer boxes were me performing. Neither one got me what I wanted, which was to be known and liked as myself. The clothes I wear now are not the loudest or the safest things I have ever owned. They are just mine, and that turned out to be the thing that worked.

I know the pressure to fit in, even when it means shelving your own style to do it. I am telling you this so you can skip a year or two of what I did.

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Using Your Archetype Without Dressing Like a Costume

Your archetype can work like a filter, and a filter is very different from a uniform. It does not tell you that every Wildflower needs a certain skirt or every Icon needs a blazer. It gives you another way to describe what feels right so you can make choices faster.

A Visionary wears clothes that feel clean, fresh, and a little unexpected without being loud. Think a simple outfit with one great shape, color, or detail that makes it feel finished rather than generic.

An Icon gravitates toward structure and polish, even on a student budget: a sharp jacket, a great thrifted coat, clean sneakers, a bag that holds its shape. The price is not what makes those pieces work. They feel deliberate and pulled together.

A Wildflower is happiest mixing color, pattern, vintage finds, handmade jewelry, and pieces nobody else would have paired. The outfit can change completely from one day to the next and still feel connected because the common thread is freedom and personality.

A Mystic reaches for deeper colors, softer layers, meaningful jewelry, or pieces that feel a little unusual or symbolic. That could be a vintage pendant, a flowing shirt, a dark hoodie they practically live in, or something they found while traveling with family.

A Homebody cares most about comfort, texture, and natural-feeling materials. Soft cotton, denim that gets better with wear, linen, a broken-in jacket, or one sweater that feels perfect every time. Their version of style looks simple, but it never feels random.

You could do this with all twelve archetypes. Do not dress the label. Use the feeling you want from your clothes as one more filter when something new catches your eye.

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The Closet Edit

Before buying more, look at what you already own. You do not have to dump your entire closet onto the floor unless that sounds fun to you. Start with the section that causes the most frustration, or pull out the pieces you wear constantly.

I will admit the full dump has its uses. When I carried everything onto my brother's old bed, the pile from Chapter 4, seeing all of it in one place was overwhelming for about an hour, and then it was clarifying. You cannot kid yourself about how much you own when it is all on one bed. I asked my mom to help, because my room drifts toward chaos when my schedule gets heavy and she is weirdly good at sorting, and having a second person there kept me from quietly hiding things in drawers again. 'How many of these do you need?' she asked, holding up a stack of nearly identical sweatshirts. 'They're different,' I said. She waited. 'Fine. Two.' Whatever did not make the cut went on Depop, which I have been running for two years anyway, because I like swapping pieces in and out to keep things interesting. I was not after a tiny closet. I wanted a closet I can see all of.

Make three groups. You can do this on your bed, on hangers, or one drawer at a time if your room is tiny.

Group one: yes, I would wear this tomorrow. You reach for it, you feel comfortable in it, and you like how you look or feel when it is on. Those are your clues.

Group two: I keep this, but I rarely choose it. Maybe it was expensive, maybe it was a gift, maybe it only works for one event, or maybe you keep hoping future-you will suddenly become the person who wears it. You do not have to get rid of it immediately. Just be honest about what role it is playing.

Group three: not sure. Put those pieces somewhere easy to reach and test them over the next couple of weeks. Wear one on a normal day and see whether you forget about the outfit, feel great in it, or spend six hours tugging at it.

Then look at group one together. What repeats? Color? Fit? Texture? Oversized shapes? Tiny details? Sneakers instead of boots? That is much more useful than deciding you need an entirely new aesthetic because somebody made a convincing video about it. For the other groups, you can keep, alter, repair, sell, swap, or donate. Aim for a closet where more of what you own gets worn. A dramatic purge is a different project.

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Shopping With Your Archetype

Once you know what you really wear, shopping can get much simpler. You are not trying to predict a whole future-you in a fitting room. You are checking whether something fits the patterns that already work for you and whether it adds something you do not already own.

Before buying it, ask: would I choose this on a normal Tuesday? Can I make at least a couple of outfits with what I already have? Do I like it, or do I just like the idea of being the

person who wears it? Your archetype can be part of that check, but your own answer matters more.

A Collector cares about construction, story, or a great secondhand find. An Adventurer needs clothes that can handle different settings and still feel interesting. For a Romantic, it is all about softness, color, movement, or a detail that makes an ordinary outfit feel special. None of those require a huge budget.

Budget matters more than archetype. Thrift, swap with friends, resell what you do not wear, borrow for one-night events, and save for the rare piece you know you will use constantly. A good wardrobe is not the one with the highest price tag. It is the one where the clothes earn their space.

More than half of my closet is secondhand, from local resale stores and Depop. I love thrifting, and I want that on the record before I say the next part. It is cheaper, it is kinder to the planet than buying new, nobody at school has the same thing, and the hunt is half the fun. If you want a closet that feels like you instead of like a catalog, secondhand is the fastest way I know to get there.

It is also the reason almost everything I owned ended up on my brother's old bed.

Here is the trap. When the $100 jeans are $10 and they fit perfectly, buying them feels practically free, so you buy them. Then you find another pair that also fits perfectly. Then you find another. I did not need ten pairs of perfect jeans. At some point I had four times as many clothes as I need, and more than my room can physically hold, which is why I cut it down instead of trying to carry a mountain into a dorm closet the size of a locker. Cheap is not free.

So secondhand has to pass the same test as full price. Would I choose this on a normal Tuesday? Does it add something I do not already own? Is there a place for it to live? If the answer to the last one is 'the chair,' the chair is already full.

The part that keeps it fun is that Depop goes both ways. What leaves my closet pays for what comes in, so the mountain is slowly turning into fewer pieces I will wear for years and a little money for the dorm. That is the version of thrifting I am taking to college. The other version is for sale.

The best deal in my town is not a store. It is a yard. An enterprising mom started a clothing swap in hers, four times a year, for fashionable middle school and high school clothes only, with no little kid stuff. Local kids drop off what they have outgrown or stopped wearing. You can sell yours and buy other people's for a tiny fraction of retail. The middle schoolers line up two hours before it opens to get the best things. I was that thirteen year old lining up early in the morning, and I regret nothing.

It works because teenagers outgrow clothes in two directions at once, sizes and styles. The jacket you loved in eighth grade is somebody's perfect find in sixth, and somebody's older sister's jeans are the ones you have been hunting for all year. Every town should have one. If yours does not, it takes one yard, one group chat, and one person willing to be that mom. Maybe I will be that mom when I have kids, or maybe I will be her before that, because

great clothes that kids outgrow should keep moving to the next kid instead of to the back of a closet or a landfill.

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The Different-Context Test

Try looking at your clothes in different contexts instead of dividing your style into one official category. What do you wear to class or work? What do you choose when you go out? What do you wear when nobody is going to see you except your roommate or your dog? The differences can be interesting.

Maybe your everyday clothes are practical and simple, but you love more color when you go out. Maybe your school style is minimal, but your weekend clothes are vintage and dramatic. That could reflect different sides of your archetype blend, or it could simply mean different situations bring out different preferences. Either answer is fine.

You do not have to pick which version is the 'real' you. If both feel good, both count.

The clearest example of this in my own life is soccer. I have played since I was three, and I play striker, which is the person who is supposed to score the goals and who gets a lot of the glory when it works. On the field I do not think about my hair or my makeup the way I do on a normal school day. It is not unusual to be playing in freezing rain or in 100 degree heat, and in those conditions the outfit is the last thing on anyone's mind. The uniform is about the sport. How I look in it is beside the point. There is one exception. I roll my shorts up even when everyone else on the field is wearing theirs long, which I suppose is the rebel in me. The soccer version of me and the school version of me dress nothing alike, and both of them are me.

Since this is the wardrobe chapter, I should admit something: about five percent of my closet is Brandy Melville, with a few more pieces from the trendy online stores you already know. Most of the rest is thrifted. That five percent is my own version of the sad beige epidemic, just in white, black, and navy. I know exactly what it is, I am buying into a trend with my eyes open, and some days I just want to blend in. It also happens to look really good on my body type, so who can argue with that? After the sweatshirt year and the costume year, I have decided that is allowed. Blending in on purpose is different from hiding, and the difference is that I know why I am doing it.

The part that took me longer to figure out is that your clothes do not have to carry your whole personality to school every day. High school can be a judgy place. College gets a little more relaxed about creative expression, but even there, not everyone wants to be the main character in the hallway. My most creative self shows up at Halloween and at concerts, when I get to put together outfits I would never wear anywhere else. That is where I shine, and I get a lot of attention for it, because for once the outside matches the inside.

The rest of the year, that side needs somewhere else to live, and there are more options than people think. It can live in your room, on a shelf or a small altar with objects that mean something, in the pajamas nobody sees, in a sketchbook, in a diary, in a project you are

building at your desk at midnight, or in a Depop shop where your taste gets to be loud even when your outfit is quiet. Your wardrobe can keep you comfortable in a crowd while the rest of your life is where you are all the way yourself. There are a lot of ways to be you before you are ready to wear it out of the house.

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One Thing This Week

Remember the black suit from Chapter 3? Trying something on can change the way you stand before it changes anything about your actual life. The suit was an afternoon experiment, and it made me realize there are clothes that help me disappear, clothes that feel like a costume, and clothes that make me feel ready to walk into a room. I want to recognize the difference.

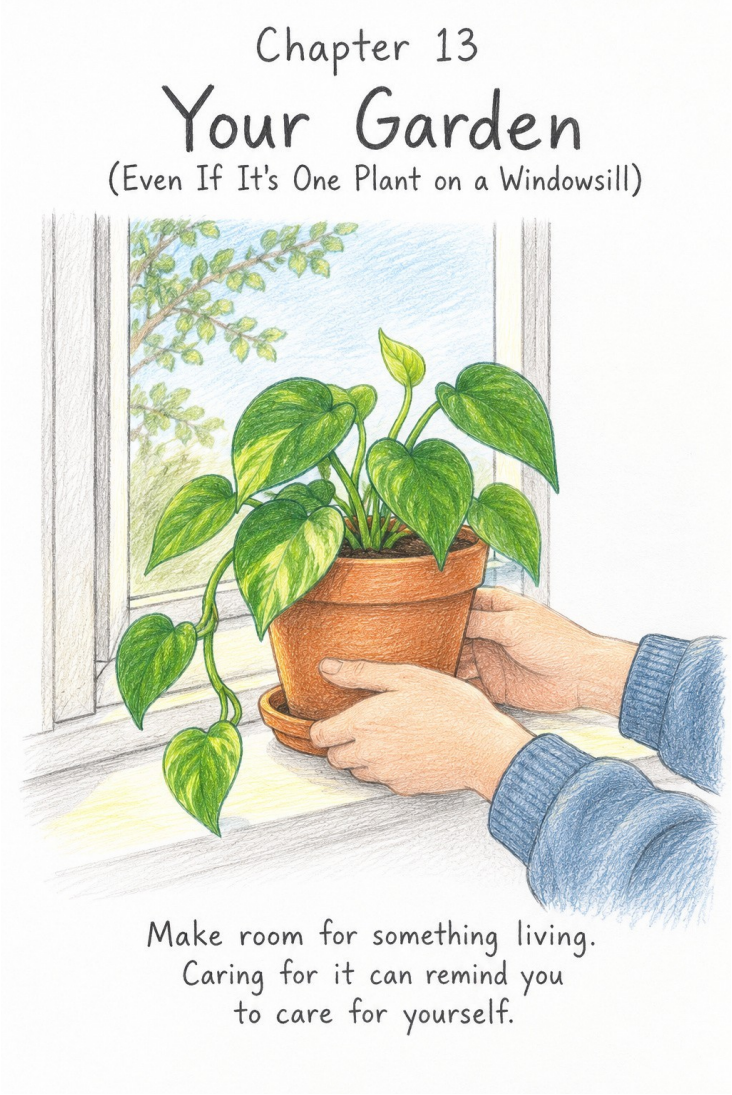
The interesting part is what happens in front of the mirror and then out in the world. Do you straighten up? Do you relax? Do you tug at your sleeves all day, or forget about the outfit entirely? Those reactions are worth paying attention to, even when you put everything back on the rack. Try something unexpected on a low stakes day, like a concert or Halloween, and notice what feels so good you want to wear it again.

This week, pull out ten pieces you genuinely like wearing. Put them together and look for patterns. What colors keep showing up? What shapes? What materials? Which ones make you feel most like yourself without requiring a whole performance?

Then use those ten pieces as evidence. The next time you shop, compare the new thing to what already works instead of asking whether it belongs to whatever aesthetic is trending.

The closet has a cheap version too. For free, do the closet edit, hold a swap night with friends, or wear the thing you have been saving for an occasion that never comes. For under $20, find a thrifted jacket, a belt that fixes three pairs of pants, or a hem taken up so the pants you own finally fit. If you save for one thing, make it one coat you will wear for five winters.

Your clothes do not have to announce who you are. They just should not make you feel like you are dressed as somebody else.



You might be thinking: I don't have a garden. I have a dorm room, an apartment, or maybe one windowsill, and the last plant I owned did not exactly flourish.

Good, because this chapter is for you too.

When I say garden, I mean your relationship with nature in whatever form fits your real life. That could be a balcony, a windowsill, a few herbs in the kitchen, fresh flowers, or simply making more room for natural light and outdoor time. A yard is not required. One small way of including the living world around you counts.

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Why Nature Belongs in the Picture

There is a word I kept seeing while I researched this book: biophilia. It is the idea that people have an instinctive connection to the natural world. Studies of green space, natural views, daylight, and plants have found links with things like mood, stress recovery, and

attention. One houseplant is not medicine. Nature is still worth treating as part of the room instead of an afterthought.

That matters when so much of school, work, and social life happens indoors and on screens. I can go through an entire day bouncing between a classroom, a car, a laptop, and my phone without really noticing that I have barely been outside. A plant will not fix your life, but a little more nature can make a room feel less flat and a day feel less boxed in.

So think of your garden dimension as the way you bring nature into daily life. Your archetype can give you ideas for how to do that, but it is only a starting point.

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Start With One Plant

If you have zero plants and becoming a 'plant person' sounds like a whole new responsibility, start with one. Pick a plant you genuinely like, make sure it can handle the light you have, and put it somewhere you will see it.

For a Minimalist, that is one sculptural plant in a simple pot. A Wildflower loves a pothos spilling over a shelf. A Mystic folds a distinctive plant into a quiet reading or reflection corner. That is one plant and three completely different rooms.

One plant is enough to change the feeling of a corner. More is not automatically better. Choose something that fits your space and that you will realistically take care of.

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Your Archetype in the Garden

Your archetype can be useful here because it gives you a question to ask: what kind of nature would I enjoy living with?

A Homebody picks something useful: basil, rosemary, mint, or a tomato plant if there is enough sun. Tending something you can cook with makes the nature part feel practical instead of decorative.

A Romantic wants flowers, softness, and scent. That could mean a small flowering plant, one grocery-store bunch divided into a few tiny vases, or even pressed flowers in a frame. It does not have to become an expensive weekly flower habit to feel beautiful.

A Visionary would rather have one sculptural plant that creates a clean visual moment than a jungle of little pots. A tall plant by a window can make even a basic apartment corner feel more finished.

A Mystic is drawn to plants that feel symbolic or calming to them, or to a small green corner used for journaling, stretching, or quiet time. The meaning can come from the ritual of caring for the plant, and the plant does not need magical powers for that to work.

An Adventurer keeps plants connected to memories: a cutting from a friend, a little cactus from a local market, or a plant that somehow survived a move. The story matters as much as the species.

The research side is the Collector's favorite part: learning what a plant needs, finding the right pot, and choosing a small collection that looks deliberate instead of buying whatever happens to be closest to the register.

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Your Archetype Plant

If you want a starting point, here is one plant idea for each archetype. These are meant as inspiration. Your light, space, pets, dorm rules, budget, and willingness to remember watering matter more than the label. Always check whether a plant is safe around any pets who share your space.

I checked this list against the ASPCA's plant list because of Omi, and so you do not have to. Basil, rosemary, prayer plants, maidenhair ferns, staghorn ferns, pilea, orchids, and air plants are safe around cats and dogs. Bird of paradise, lavender, pothos, rubber plants, monstera, ZZ plants, and snake plants are not, so if an animal shares your space, swap in a spider plant, a parlor palm, or a cast iron plant, which are safe and just as easy to keep alive. And never bring lilies into a home with a cat, because even the pollen can be deadly to them.

The Visionary: a bird of paradise in a bright room, or another tall, sculptural plant if your space is smaller. The idea is one strong shape rather than lots of little things.

The Homebody: basil or rosemary. You can smell it, touch it, and cook with it. Just make sure it gets the light it needs.

The Mystic: a prayer plant or lavender if your conditions suit it. Both have distinctive color or movement and can make a quiet corner feel special, and neither one turns it into a shrine.

The Collector: a maidenhair fern if you enjoy learning a plant's care routine. It is beautiful but not the easiest roommate. If that sounds annoying rather than fun, choose something less dramatic.

The Wildflower: a pothos or another trailing plant. Let it spill from a shelf or climb a small trellis. It adds movement, and it does not need a perfectly styled setup.

The Icon: a rubber plant or another plant with large, confident leaves. One substantial plant can give a room presence, and the other surfaces stay clear.

The Alchemist: a staghorn fern, pilea, or another plant with an unusual shape. The fun is choosing something that makes people stop and ask, 'What is that?'

The Minimalist: an orchid or one very simple plant in a plain pot. The empty space around it is part of the look.

The Host: a monstera or an easy plant you can propagate and share. Passing a cutting to a friend turns the plant into part of a relationship, which fits the Host beautifully.

The Modernist: a ZZ plant or snake plant. Clean lines, strong shape, and relatively unfussy care make either one work well in a simple setup.

The Romantic: a small flowering plant or fresh stems in one beautiful vase. Think color and softness, and keep the bouquet smaller than your head.

The Adventurer: an air plant, small cactus, or succulent picked up somewhere memorable. A passport stamp is optional. A story from your own city still counts.

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Beyond Plants: Nature as a Design Element

Your garden dimension is bigger than houseplants. It can include wood, stone, linen, clay, daylight, an open window, or even the view from where you sit. It can also include nature sounds, although I would choose the real thing when it is available.

It also includes what you do outside. Maybe you eat on a balcony when the weather is good, study under a tree, walk the long way home because the route is prettier, or sit somewhere for ten minutes that you do not have to post or count as exercise.

A Homebody keeps herbs by the kitchen window. A Modernist's answer is one clean planter on a balcony. A Host cares more about having a place where friends can sit outside together. There is no correct version. Pay attention to what kind of contact with nature feels good in your life.

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If You Keep Killing Plants

This deserves its own section because killing a plant can make you decide you are simply 'bad at plants.' I have done that kind of dramatic conclusion too. Usually the explanation is less personal.

Plants can struggle for all kinds of boring reasons: too much or too little light, inconsistent watering, poor drainage, temperature changes, or simply being the wrong plant for the space. None of that is a character flaw.

Before buying one, check the light in the spot where it will live and ask what kind of care the plant needs. Then choose something forgiving enough for your real schedule. If you travel, forget things, or have a chaotic semester, that should be part of the design brief too.

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One Thing This Week

If you do not have a plant and want one, start by checking the light in your room. Then ask a plant shop or nursery for something that can handle those conditions. Pick one you like looking at, and ignore the one the internet says you are supposed to own.

If you already have plants, look at the group with fresh eyes. Do the pots work together? Would moving one closer to a window help it and improve the room? Could one plant look better on its own instead of being squeezed into a cluster? Small changes count.

And if the weather is decent, spend ten minutes outside without your phone. Take in the temperature, light, air, sounds, and whatever is growing nearby. You do not have to turn it into mindfulness homework. Just be there.

Plants are one of the cheapest dimensions in this book. For free, take a cutting from a friend, open the window, spend ten minutes outside, or look at the view you have not noticed in a month. For under $20, buy a spider plant or a pothos (check the pet list first), a pot with a drainage hole, and a bag of soil. If you save for one thing, make it one big plant for the empty corner, or a grow light if your window faces a wall.

A backyard is optional. One plant, one window, or one outdoor habit can be enough to make nature part of how you design your life.



Your workspace might be a dorm desk, your bedroom, the kitchen table, a library corner, a studio, or the same laptop you carry everywhere. At 17, 19, or 22, it probably does not look like a polished home office, and it does not need to. The useful question is simpler: does the place where you study or work make the task easier or harder?

I started paying more attention to this because I could feel the difference between trying to focus in a cluttered, distracting setup and sitting down somewhere that had what I needed and not much else. The second version does not make the assignment fun, sadly. It just removes a few unnecessary battles.

A cheap, unphotogenic workspace can still support concentration, creativity, and organization. Sometimes the biggest improvement is moving a charger, clearing part of the desk, or getting last week's project out of your line of sight.

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The Desk That Helps You Work

Start with the basic question: what do you do here? Homework? Drawing? Coding? Writing? Makeup before class and then chemistry notes ten minutes later? A good desk works for your real life. The imaginary person with a color-coded planner and no mess can get their own desk.

Look at what is on the surface. What do you reach for every day? What is just taking up room? What distracts you? Keep the things that help, move the things that do not, and leave enough open space to use the desk.

I like one personal thing on a work surface because otherwise a desk can start to feel weirdly anonymous. A photo in a frame, a tiny piece of art, a plant, a souvenir, or something you made can make the space feel like yours, and one is enough.

One more thing about desks, because it took me years to figure out. My brain starts a big assignment by breaking it into small ones. So every big project goes on one page where I can see all of it, chopped into pieces, and the piece I am doing next sits on top of the pile, alone, with nothing else in front of me. That is my design brief. If your brain works the same way, build it into the setup instead of waiting to become a different kind of student.

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Your Archetype at Work

A Visionary needs a clear desk, good light, and one image or object connected to something they want to create. Too much visual clutter can compete with the clean, forward-looking feeling they like.

A Collector enjoys choosing a few objects carefully: a notebook they love, one good pen, a small reference stack, and a mug or tray that makes the setup feel considered. Perfection is not the assignment. The pieces just need to feel like they belong together.

A Homebody wants warmer materials, a ceramic cup, a wooden surface, or a small plant. If candles or diffusers are not allowed in a dorm or shared space, skip them. A tactile desk mat or natural texture can create the same warmer feeling, and neither one sets off a smoke alarm.

An Icon's desk feels orderly and capable: clear surface, good storage, and one or two strong pieces rather than lots of little accessories. Think confidence, and skip the imaginary executive office at 19.

A Wildflower needs more visual stimulation: colorful supplies, sketches, a pinboard, or rotating inspiration. That can absolutely work. The test is whether the stuff helps ideas happen or whether you are excavating for your laptop every morning.

For an Adventurer, the setup has to move. A laptop sleeve, charger pouch, headphones, notebook, and a small bag can turn a library table, cafe, studio, or friend's apartment into a temporary workspace, so the permanent desk becomes optional.

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When Your Bedroom Is Also Your Workspace

For a lot of students, the place where you sleep is also where you study, get ready, scroll, talk to friends, and drop your backpack. That makes boundaries hard because the same few square feet are doing five different jobs.

A separate office is not required. A small cue that says, 'this is where I work now,' can be enough. It could be the desk itself, a lamp you turn on only when studying, a tray that holds school supplies, or a laptop stand that comes out when it is time to focus.

The reverse matters too. When you are done, close the laptop, put the materials away, or move the chair back. Tiny physical changes can help one corner switch jobs, and the rest of the room stays a bedroom.

This is especially useful in a dorm or first apartment where every inch has multiple purposes. You are not creating a perfect work zone. You are making starting and stopping a little clearer.

The strongest form of this is two places instead of one. If your bed is also your desk, your brain never gets a clear signal about which job you are doing, so studying feels sleepy and sleeping feels like homework. Give the two jobs two places, even if the second place is not in your room. If you live at home and your room does not have a desk, the dining room table works, and so does the couch. In a dorm, it might be the library, the lounge at the end of the hall, one specific chair in a cafe, or the empty classroom nobody uses after four. Then protect the bed. Nothing with a deadline happens on it. Sleep researchers have been saying a version of this for decades, because a bed that is only for sleeping is easier to fall asleep in.

I do a lot of my work on my laptop lying in bed, which is exactly what I just told you not to do. When I am overwhelmed and do not want the distractions at home, I go to the local library, and it works every time. So here is my commitment: when there is a lot of homework or tests coming up, I am moving to the couch, the dining table, or the library, so the work does not follow me into my sleep.

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Your Chair Is Not a Small Detail

If you sit for long stretches, an uncomfortable chair can make it harder to concentrate simply because your body keeps asking for attention. Your feet, back, shoulders, and screen height matter more than whether the chair looks cool.

An expensive chair is optional too. Try what you have first. Can your feet rest comfortably? Can you add a firm cushion or adjust the height? If the chair truly does not work, secondhand office furniture can be a much better use of money than decorative desk accessories.

Thrift stores tend to have an abundance of office chairs. My mom tried to give hers away, and the thrift store would not even take them, because they had so many already. They are

all different, so sit in a few and find one that supports you. While you are at it, think about your neck. Our generation already spends most of the day looking down at a phone while standing or walking around, which is where the term tech neck comes from. At home, at your own computer, you can at least set things up so the middle of the screen is at eye level when you are sitting up straight. A stack of books under the laptop does it for free. You will be glad you started early.

You can still make the chair feel like yours. A Homebody adds a washable textured cushion. A Modernist picks something simple with a clean shape. A Wildflower goes with one removable colorful seat pad. Get comfortable first, then make it personal.

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Digital Workspace Counts Too

Your workspace also lives on your screen. Desktop files, tabs, notifications, folders, bookmarks, and the first screen you see when you open your laptop can either make it easy to find what you need or add tiny bits of friction all day.

A Minimalist wants almost nothing on the desktop. A Visionary keeps current projects easy to reach and uses a wallpaper that feels motivating. A Wildflower goes for more color and visual personality. None of those approaches is automatically better if the system works for the person using it.

Try a fifteen-minute digital reset. Close the browser tabs you are definitely not going back to. Put loose files into a few folders with names you will understand next week. Turn off one notification you never needed. You may be surprised by how much calmer the screen feels when it is not asking for your attention in twelve directions at once.

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One Thing This Week

Clear enough of your desk to see the surface. Put back the things you use, then choose one personal item you genuinely want there. That is enough. Matching organizers can wait, and the whole room can stay exactly as it is.

Use the setup for a day and see what still annoys you. Maybe the charger is on the wrong side. Maybe the light is bad. Maybe your headphones never have a home. Fix the thing that keeps getting in your way instead of decorating around it.

A good desk setup can cost almost nothing. For free, clear the surface, move the charger to the correct side, do the fifteen minute digital reset, or stack a few books into a monitor stand. For under $20, buy a desk lamp, a tray for the small stuff, or a cable clip so the charger stops falling behind the desk. If you save for one thing, make it a chair your back agrees with, secondhand if possible.

Your workspace does not need to look impressive. It needs to help you begin, keep going, and eventually stop working so the rest of your room can be your life again.

Chapter 15
Your Digital Presence



Let what you share reflect who you are.
Your story deserves your own voice.

Sometimes before I meet someone from a club, class, internship, or even a group chat, I look them up. A profile picture, bio, a few posts, maybe a portfolio link, and suddenly I have a first impression before we have had a real conversation.

That impression can be useful, but it can also be wildly incomplete. A photo from two years ago does not know you changed your hair. An old bio does not know you changed interests. A feed can show what you posted, and that is a long way from everything about who you are.

That is why I started thinking of digital presence as another design space. Not a place to invent a brand-new personality. More like the online room someone walks into before they meet you. You get to decide what is public, what feels current, and what you would rather keep private. You cannot control what everybody thinks about you. You can keep a three-year-old version of your online life from doing all the talking.

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Try looking at one of your own profiles as if it belonged to someone you did not know. What would you guess about that person? Creative? Funny? Soccer-obsessed? Quiet? Very into sunsets? There is no correct answer.

Then ask a better question: does that guess feel close enough to you right now? If it does, great. If not, the fix may be tiny. A new photo, a shorter bio, a portfolio link, deleting an outdated highlight, or changing what is public can make the page feel less like a time capsule.

Different platforms also have different jobs. Your private group-chat profile does not need to look like LinkedIn. Instagram does not have to look like a resume. A design portfolio should probably make it easy to find your work. Consistency can help, but pretending every corner of the internet is one perfectly matched brand sounds exhausting. Some accounts can be goofy, some practical, and some barely used. They can all belong to the same person and still look different.

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The archetypes are not rules for how your account should look. If they help, use them as prompts. A Visionary's profile feels bright, uncluttered, and focused on projects or ideas they are excited about. Clean does not have to mean blank.

A Romantic cares more about color, photos, and little details that make a page feel warm or personal. That could be a favorite photo, a soft color palette, or captions that sound like a real person instead of a press release.

A Collector thinks hard about what makes the cut. A smaller portfolio, organized highlights, favorite art or music, and a few photos with real stories may feel better than posting everything. Editing can be part of the look.

A Wildflower is completely fine with a grid that does not match. Memes, art, friends, thrift finds, soccer photos, random color, whatever. If it feels alive and recognizably theirs, perfect coordination is not the point.

An Icon prefers a clear photo, a concise bio, and polished work samples, especially on a college, internship, or job-facing profile. The important information should be easy to understand and easy to find, and it should never feel intimidating.

A Mystic keeps more of their life private and shares fewer, more reflective things. Moodier photos, art, stars, journal lines, music, or quiet moments could fit. Privacy itself can be part of the design.

Mixing things that normally live in separate boxes is the Alchemist's specialty: a coding project next to a thrift flip, hand-drawn graphics next to a clean portfolio, serious work next to something funny. The mix can be the interesting part.

You can count on a Minimalist to post less, keep the bio simple, and leave more empty space. They do not need thirty highlights or daily updates to prove anything. Quiet is allowed online too.

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A profile photo matters because it is often tiny and one of the first things people see. It does not need to communicate your entire personality. It just needs to make sense for the account. If someone is trying to connect your profile to an application, club, or project, being recognizable is more useful than being mysterious.

For a school club, internship, portfolio, or LinkedIn, a clear photo where your face is easy to see is useful. For a personal account, you have more room to play. Light, background, clothes, and crop can support the feeling you want, and one photo never has to carry your whole personality.

A professional photographer is optional. A friend, a decent phone camera, and good light are enough. Your friend is likely to take forty photos, of which you only need one. Take a few options and choose one that feels current. You also do not have to use the exact same photo everywhere if the platforms serve different parts of your life. Before you post a new one, glance at the background too. A great photo can still share more about your location, school, or routine than you meant to.

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Now look at your last twelve posts, pinned items, or highlights. Not because your grid has to match. I mostly want you to see what someone would learn about you from what you have chosen to leave visible. Check tagged photos, old highlights, and location sharing too. Digital design includes boundaries along with colors and fonts.

Does it still represent things you want classmates, colleges, internship coordinators, or random strangers to see? If yes, keep it. If an old post is meaningful, keep that too. You do not have to erase your history just because your taste changed. You also do not owe the internet a complete autobiography. Keeping something private is not hiding who you are. Sometimes it is just choosing who gets access to which part of your life.

If you want the page to feel more connected, pick a pattern you already like instead of making a bunch of rules. Maybe you want to show more of what you make, more friends, more outdoors, or fewer random reposts. The best clue is what you keep wanting to share. And if the account is mainly for friends, it can stay messy. A personal page does not need to become a marketing project just because you learned a few design rules.

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If you have a design portfolio, side project, club, art account, or something you want colleges or employers to see, a simple website or portfolio page can help. It does not need fancy animation or a dramatic personal brand. A school project page, a simple portfolio, or one clean link page can be enough.

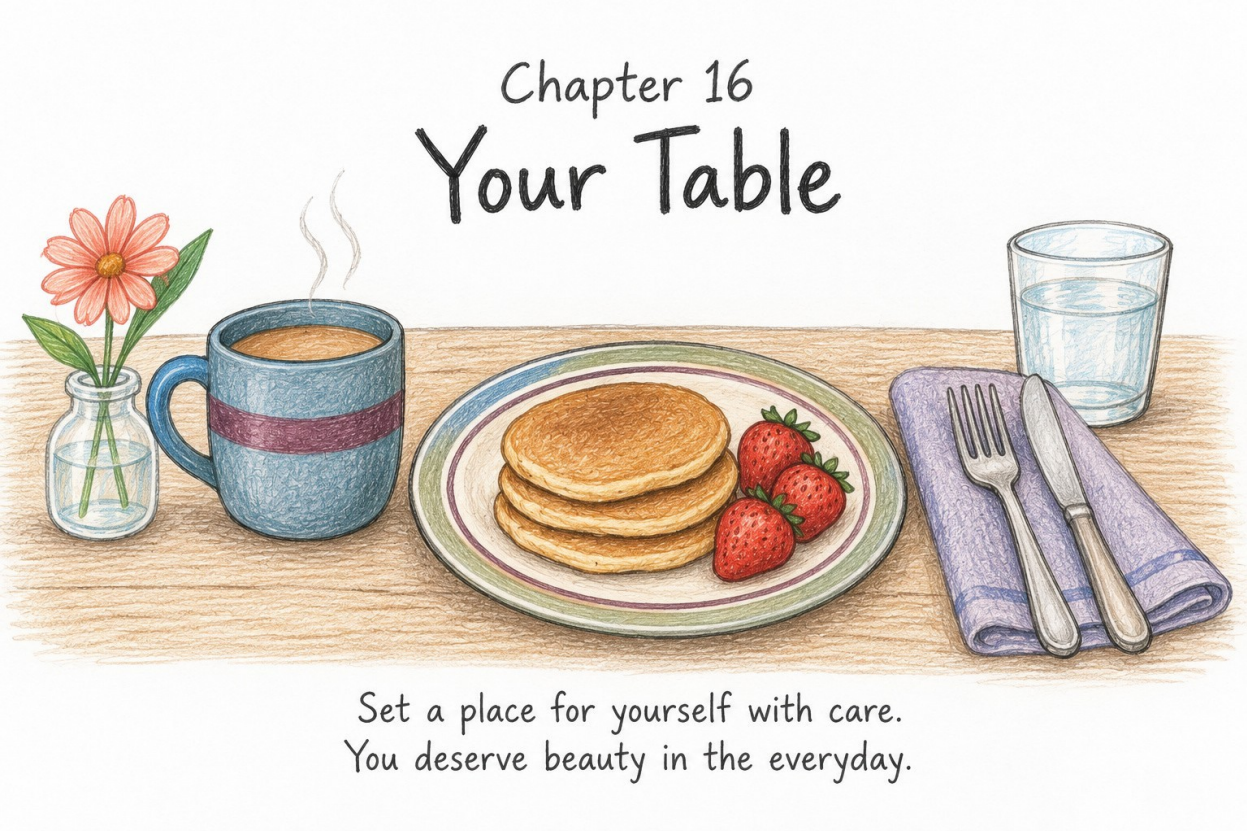
Start with function. What should someone be able to find in ten seconds? Your work, a short bio, how to contact you, maybe a resume or project list. Then use your taste for the colors, type, images, and amount of space around everything.

Templates are completely fine. Starting from one can save a lot of time. Change enough that the page feels like yours and make sure the design does not hide the thing you want people to find. A beautiful site that makes someone hunt for your work is not helping.

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This week, pick one public profile and give it a fifteen-minute reset. Check the photo, bio, links, pinned or highlighted stuff, and privacy settings. Remove one thing that feels outdated and update one thing that feels current. Then stop. Your digital presence does not need a makeover every time you change your mind. If you can, look at the profile while logged out too. That is often the easiest way to see what a stranger can see.

Everything in this chapter is free. Updating a photo, rewriting a bio, deleting an old highlight, and checking your privacy settings cost nothing but fifteen minutes.



This one sounds more formal than it is. When I say your table is a design dimension, I do not mean formal dinner parties with cloth napkins and place cards. I mean the little setup around eating, even when there is no table.

That could be a dorm desk, a kitchen counter, a school cafeteria, a picnic blanket, or takeout on the floor with friends. The bowl, mug, light, noise, people around you, and whether you are trying to answer texts with one hand all become part of the experience.

In a dorm, 'your table' is usually the desk you also do homework on, the end of the bed, or the floor between two beds. The kitchen is a mini fridge, a microwave down the hall, a meal plan, and one real mug. With a setup that small, the few things you own get used several times a day, so it is worth making sure the one mug and the one bowl are ones you really love and that reflect who you truly are, because then they will bring more joy into your life.

Food can already come with enough pressure, so this chapter is not about eating the 'right' way or making every snack pretty. I am looking at whether the space around a meal makes it easier to pause, talk, enjoy what you are eating, or just get through a busy day with the bowl somewhere other than your laptop. Maybe you have a meal plan, share a kitchen with your family, eat between practice and homework, or live with roommates who all have different schedules. The setup still matters even when you do not control much of it.

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Think about your last normal meal. I do not mean a birthday dinner or a restaurant. I mean something you ate on a regular day at home, school, work, or a dorm.

Where were you? What were you eating from? Was there room for your elbows? Were you watching something because you wanted to, or because the screen was already there? Maybe you ate straight from the takeout container while standing in the kitchen. That is completely fine. Maybe you used your favorite bowl and sat at the counter. That is also fine. The interesting part is whether the setup worked for you.

When I pay attention to this, small things stand out. I like a mug that feels good in my hand. I eat more comfortably when there is a clear spot to sit. Food with friends feels different when nobody is fighting a pile of mail for table space. None of that is deep. It is still design. I am not trying to turn every meal into a ceremony. I am looking for the tiny parts that make an ordinary meal nicer and the parts that are just annoying.

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A Homebody reaches for a warm mug, a wood board, a cloth napkin, or dishes that feel sturdy and familiar. None of it has to match. A thrifted bowl you use constantly can fit better than a whole new set.

A Romantic always adds one pretty detail: a flower in a jar, a favorite plate, softer light, or a little color. If candles are not allowed where you live, a small lamp or battery tea light can do the job and keep you on the right side of the dorm rules.

A Minimalist wants the opposite: a clear surface, one bowl, one glass, and not much else competing for attention. The empty space can be part of what makes the meal feel easier.

A Host will think about the people first. Is there an extra fork? Somewhere for a friend to sit? Can the snacks go in the middle? Their table can be mismatched and still work beautifully because making room is what matters.

An Icon likes the setup to feel a little more pulled together: dishes that work together, a clean surface, and a cloth napkin instead of whatever paper towel was closest. It can feel polished and still stay relaxed.

An Adventurer cares less about matching dishes and more about trying something new: a recipe from a friend, food from a neighborhood market, or a meal connected to a family story. For me, that is pão de queijo, the little Brazilian cheese breads my family has eaten for as long as I can remember, and the organic vegan food I ate for six weeks in Bali and still think about. The interest comes from the experience. Collecting objects from places you barely know is a different hobby.

An Alchemist has the most fun with the mix. Leftovers turn into something new, an old thrifted plate looks great next to a modern cup, or breakfast happens at dinner because that is what sounds good. Experimentation matters more than making the meal complicated.

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Changing this dimension does not require a kitchen redesign. Start with one thing you already touch all the time.

Maybe it is your mug, water bottle, bowl, or plate. Pull out the things you reach for most and ask yourself why. Shape? Weight? Color? A memory attached to it? If nothing you own

feels special and you want something new, one thrift-store find is enough. A matching set can stay on the store shelf. In a dorm or shared apartment, one favorite mug or bowl may be the only part of the setup that is completely yours, and that can be enough.

Then look at where you usually eat. Can you clear one placemat-sized patch? Is the light harsh? Is the chair uncomfortable? Is somebody's mail permanently living where dinner is supposed to go? Fix the annoying part before you shop for anything. If you share a kitchen, even giving your own stuff one shelf, basket, or drawer can make meals easier because you are not searching for a fork every single time.

A nicer setup will not turn Tuesday-night leftovers into a restaurant meal. It can make ten or twenty minutes feel less random and a little more pleasant. That matters mostly because you repeat it so often. Sometimes the difference is just moving the stack of papers, turning off the harsh overhead light, or sitting somewhere that is not also covered in homework.

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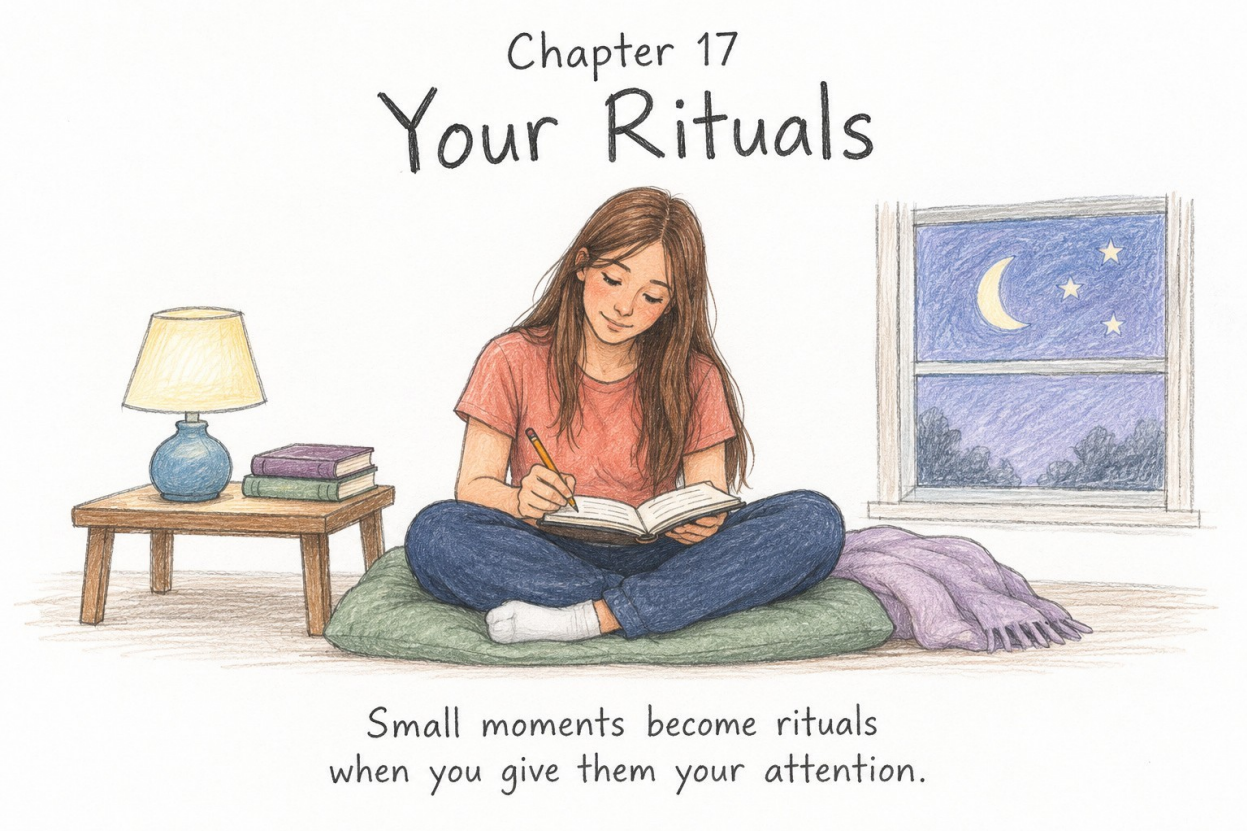
You also do not need a dining room to have people over. A dorm lounge, picnic blanket, coffee table, floor cushions, kitchen island, or takeout on the bed can work. A Wildflower mixes every plate they own, a Host cares more about enough seats, and an Icon makes the setup a little neater. None is more correct. Movie night with popcorn on the floor counts. So does a picnic after class or everyone eating takeout around the coffee table.

And if hosting sounds stressful, skip it. Hospitality does not have to be a performance. If you do want friends over, clear enough space for them to sit, put out water, choose some music, and use whatever dishes you have. Ask roommates before taking over shared space. Pizza on paper plates can be a great night. Nobody gets extra points for cooking from scratch or owning matching dishes. I have never once heard anyone say, 'Great night, but the plates didn't match.'

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Try one small table experiment this week. Use a mug, bowl, plate, or bottle you already like. Clear a little space. Change one thing about the light, sound, or where you sit. If you want company, invite someone; if you want quiet, keep it quiet. See what made the meal easier or nicer, then keep that part. No new dish set required. And if a show, playlist, or phone call makes the meal more fun, keep it. This is an experiment, and there is no rule about the correct way to eat.

Your table costs less to fix than almost anything else here. For free, clear a patch the size of a placemat, find the one real mug at the back of the cabinet, or turn off the overhead light at dinner. For under $20, buy a thrifted bowl you love, a cloth napkin, or a tray that turns a lap into a table. If you save for one thing and a dorm is in your future, make it a mini fridge that does not sound like a truck when it is running.



You already have routines you repeat on autopilot. I like calling some of them rituals because it makes me pay attention to the tiny parts of a day that can feel either helpful or weirdly chaotic.

The order you get ready for school. The playlist you put on while cleaning. What you do when you get home from practice. The way you wind down before bed. None of this needs to be deep or impressive. It is just the stuff you repeat enough that it starts shaping how your day feels.

When I say these routines are designable, I do not mean you need a two-hour morning routine involving journaling, a cold plunge, twelve supplements, and sunrise yoga. I mean you can keep what works, change what keeps annoying you, and make the routine fit your real life.

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Mornings are a good example because small setup choices can make them easier. Research on sleep and circadian rhythms suggests that light and regular sleep-wake patterns matter, but there is no magic first-thirty-minutes formula that determines your whole day. Some mornings are calm. Some mornings you hit snooze three times and cannot find a clean sock.

So instead of trying to create the perfect morning, ask a smaller question: what would make mine work a little better? Your archetype can give you ideas, but your schedule gets a vote too.

A Homebody likes a slower start when there is time: comfortable clothes, breakfast they enjoy, natural light, and a few quiet minutes before leaving. On a school morning, that could be as simple as packing the night before so breakfast is not eaten while searching for a charger.

A Visionary starts with something that gives the day direction: checking the calendar, writing down the one thing they really want to finish, or opening the blinds and getting moving. It does not need to become a five-year vision session before first period.

A Mystic needs a few quiet minutes to journal, pray, meditate, stretch, or just sit without immediately opening social media. If tarot, incense, or another personal practice matters to them, that can be part of it too. It is a preference, and the archetype does not require it.

A Wildflower hates doing the exact same sequence every morning. They prefer choices: two playlists, different breakfasts, getting ready in a different order, or taking a quick walk when there is time. Enough structure to get out the door, enough freedom that the routine does not feel like detention.

An Icon enjoys knowing what happens next: clothes ready, bag packed, keys in the same place, calendar checked. I aspire to this. I achieve it about twice a month, usually by accident. The appeal is not being in command of the universe before 8 a.m. It is avoiding the specific horror of realizing your permission slip is still on the printer when you are already late.

A Host wants a little connection in the morning: breakfast with family, a text to a friend, walking to class with someone, or talking to a roommate while getting ready. Another Host wants quiet first. The archetype is a clue, and a clue is not a personality law.

A Modernist lives for removing unnecessary steps. The charger sits where it is needed, the backpack goes by the door, and the routine stays short. If they can save five minutes and keep the morning from turning into a military operation, even better.

An Alchemist changes one element when the routine feels stale: a new breakfast, a different route, a sketch before class, or music that changes the mood. They do not need to transform into a different human before breakfast. Sometimes novelty is enough.

A Minimalist wants less happening at once. Fewer notifications, a simple breakfast, a clear bathroom counter, or five quiet minutes before the day gets loud. Their routine can be short. Leaving a little breathing room may be enough.

Whatever you do with your hair, your skin, or your beard in the morning is part of the routine too. Treat those ten minutes like a choice instead of something that happens to you. The same goes for the version where you do nothing, which is also a choice, and a fine one.

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Evenings are worth noticing too, especially if bedtime has quietly turned into 'one more video' until the clock becomes personally insulting.

Sleep research does support keeping a fairly consistent schedule and reducing bright light and stimulating screen use close to bedtime when those things interfere with sleep. But there is no single perfect wind-down routine. One person may read. Another showers after

practice, packs for tomorrow, texts friends, then listens to music. The question is what helps your brain and body realize the day is ending.

For a Romantic, that is softer light and a favorite lotion. A Collector reads a few pages of something they chose because they want to read it. A Homebody makes tea or straightens the bed. If your phone keeps you awake, try charging it farther away or using a sleep setting. If it does not, leaving it nearby is fine. Rest is not a test.

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Rituals also happen in the middle of normal life. Those may be the ones I like best because they do not require waking up at 5 a.m. or becoming a person who owns a matching journal set.

Maybe you have a specific playlist for homework, always get a snack after practice, call your dad on the walk home, make hot chocolate when it rains, or clean your room while talking to a friend on speaker. The repeated part can make an ordinary moment feel familiar.

Physical cues can help too. Turning on a desk lamp when you start homework, putting your soccer bag by the door after practice, or closing your laptop when you are finished can make transitions clearer. Researchers study how context and repeated cues relate to habits, but you can test what helps on a smaller scale than a behavioral-science experiment.

The best routines are not the ones that look impressive online. They are the ones you can realistically repeat and that make some part of the day easier, calmer, more fun, or more yours. If a routine starts feeling like another assignment, change it.

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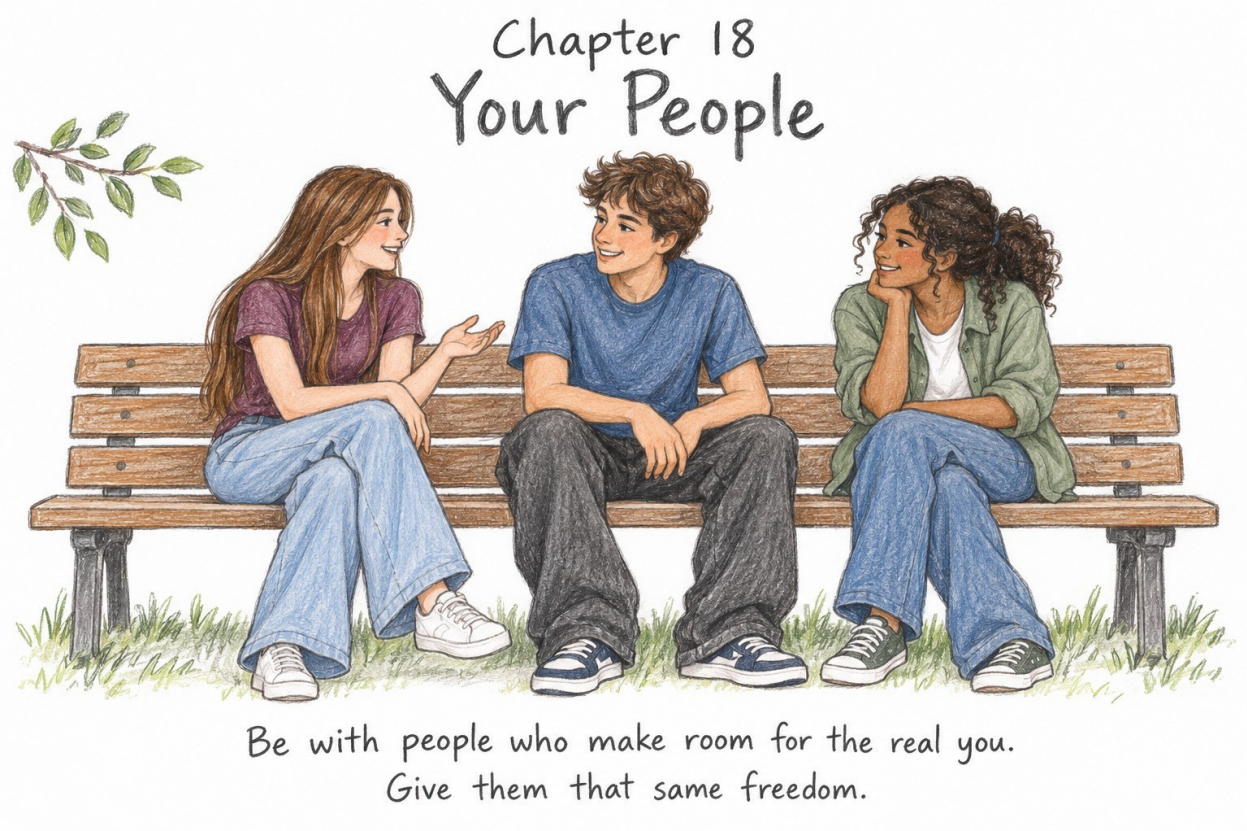
There are also routines that mark bigger transitions: the first-day-of-school photo your family always takes, decorating for a holiday, the playlist you make every summer, a team dinner before the season starts, or the movie you watch with the same friend every birthday.

Those traditions can give different parts of the year their own texture. Let the ones you already look forward to count, and keep the ones you genuinely like.

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Try this: pick one routine you already repeat and change one tiny part of it. Put your keys in one reliable spot. Make a getting-ready playlist. Set out your clothes before an early morning. Move your charger. Take five quiet minutes after practice before starting homework. Test it for a few days. If it helps, keep it. If it does not, undo it. A ritual is supposed to support your life. The moment it becomes another thing you are failing to optimize, drop it.

Money matters least in this chapter. For free, make a getting ready playlist, put your keys in one spot, set out your clothes the night before, or take the five quiet minutes. For under $20, buy an alarm clock, so the phone can sleep across the room. There is nothing to save for here.



Calling this chapter Your People is a little dangerous because people are not design projects. You cannot arrange friends the way you arrange a shelf, and I definitely do not think an archetype tells you who belongs in your life.

What you can shape is the environment around relationships: whether there is somewhere to hang out, whether you make time for people, how you communicate, and whether you feel comfortable being yourself around them. That is the part I mean by design.

At 17, this shows up everywhere: friend groups, teams, classes, group chats, family, dating, jobs, internships, roommates, and the people you keep meeting as your life gets bigger. Different settings bring out different sides of us, and it helps to know which ones feel easy and which ones take more effort.

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The archetypes can be fun prompts for thinking about connection, as long as we do not turn them into rules about how someone is supposed to act.

A Host is the friend who spots when someone is standing alone, starts the group chat, or makes sure there is room for one more person on the floor. They care a lot about making a space feel welcoming.

An Icon shows care by being reliable and straightforward: making the plan, keeping their word, or telling a friend something important even when it is not the easiest conversation. Another Icon is much quieter. The label does not decide their social life.

A Visionary loves friends who trade ideas, dream up projects, or get excited about what could happen next. They are the person saying, 'Wait, what if we tried this?' in a group project and somehow getting everyone interested.

Closeness and little details are what a Romantic cares about: remembering a birthday, making a playlist for a friend, taking photos, or creating traditions that make relationships feel special.

A Mystic prefers conversations that go beyond small talk and friendships where silence is not awkward. They want space for spiritual questions, personal beliefs, or topics their other friends do not care about. That does not make every Mystic deep and mysterious at lunch.

Alchemists are the friends who combine groups, suggest the strange plan everyone ends up loving, or help someone see a problem differently. Their social style is more experimental than predictable.

A Modernist appreciates direct communication and plans that are clear. 'Meet at 6:30 outside the theater' may feel much better than forty-seven messages ending in 'idk whatever you guys want.' Clarity can be a form of kindness.

A Minimalist would rather have one-on-one time, smaller groups, or friends who do not need every silence filled. They care less about having a huge circle and more about having enough room to think and still feel connected.

• • •

A more useful question than 'Do these people match my archetype?' is: how do I feel around them, and can I be myself here?

Some friendships leave you laughing, understood, challenged in a good way, or simply comfortable. Others can leave you tense, ignored, embarrassed, or exhausted. One interaction does not tell you everything. People have bad days, friendships go through weird phases, and you can love someone without loving every group dynamic around them.

I learned this the slow way. For a while in middle school I assumed that being liked meant being as close to invisible as possible. Then I tried being impossible to miss, and collected friendships where I mostly performed. The people I ended up keeping were the ones who asked about my drawings instead of my sweatshirt, who could sit in a quiet car without making it weird, and who did not need me to explain myself before they decided I was worth knowing. I did not have a word for that at thirteen. Now I think it is the whole thing.

Soccer helped too, and not because anyone on my team was analyzing my design identity. On the field I had a job to do and people counting on me to do it. Nobody cared what I was wearing. Belonging there felt less like matching everyone else and more like sharing a purpose, and that is still my favorite kind.

Your archetype might help explain a preference. A Wildflower enjoys friends who are open to spontaneous plans. A Host loves a busy group chat. A Minimalist needs more one-on-one time. But differences are not automatically problems. Some of my favorite friendships work because people bring completely different things to them.

What matters more is respect. Can you disagree without somebody humiliating you? Can you say no? Can you have other friends? Do they support things that matter to you even when they are not personally interested? If a relationship repeatedly makes you feel unsafe, controlled, or pressured, that is bigger than design or archetypes, and talking to someone you trust can help.

One more thing I would add, because I have been on the other side of it: give people room to tell you their story when they are ready. Someone who seems quiet, awkward, or hard to read may be having the kind of year I had in seventh grade. You do not have to know what is going on with a person to be decent to them. Not making someone explain themselves is one of the kindest things a friend can do.

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Space can make connection easier in very ordinary ways. If you want friends in your room, clear somewhere for them to sit. If your dorm is tiny, use the lounge. If the lounge is ugly, talk to your RA about a floor project to spruce it up, so it reflects the people who live there and not just the building. College is also about being out and about. You want people to hang out in your room, but you also want to be out on campus, in the nicer common areas, and outside whenever the weather is good. Sometimes go outside when it is not. A walk with an umbrella in the rain can be romantic or reflective, depending on the company. If everyone is broke, make popcorn and watch a movie instead of assuming hanging out has to cost money.

Different archetypes might prefer different kinds of plans. A Host wants a bigger group. A Collector prefers four friends and a movie everyone picked on purpose. A Wildflower texts, 'Beach in twenty minutes?' An Adventurer suggests a hike, street fair, thrift trip, or new part of town. These are ideas, and none of them is an assigned social personality.

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There is a week, usually early, when a new place has not started to feel like yours and the people in it are still strangers. Your room is the only place on campus that already feels like you, and only because you set it up that way. Nobody warns you how quiet that week can be.

If the first week in a new place feels lonely, try a few things you can repeat: one routine you brought with you, one object you can see from bed, one call to someone from home at the same time each day, and one door you leave open. Say yes to one invitation you would normally skip. Eat one meal in the dining hall instead of in your room. A lamp helps the atmosphere. The people take longer.

The week passes. If it does not pass, or it gets heavier instead of lighter, that is what the counseling center is for, and going there is a design decision too. You are choosing a space built for exactly that.

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At some point a person you like is going to see your room, and you will see it through their eyes for the first time. If that makes you nervous, you are probably nervous about the wrong thing.

They are not grading your bedding. They are looking for clues. The photo, the book on the nightstand, the weird thing on the shelf, and the plant that is barely alive are all conversation. A room that has been scrubbed of anything personal has nothing to say, and that makes the visit more awkward.

So do the obvious things. Clear the chair, deal with the laundry, and open a window. Then leave yourself in the room. 'What is this?' they will say, picking up the weird thing on the shelf. That question is the whole reason the weird thing is on the shelf. You are not trying to impress them. You are giving them something to ask about.

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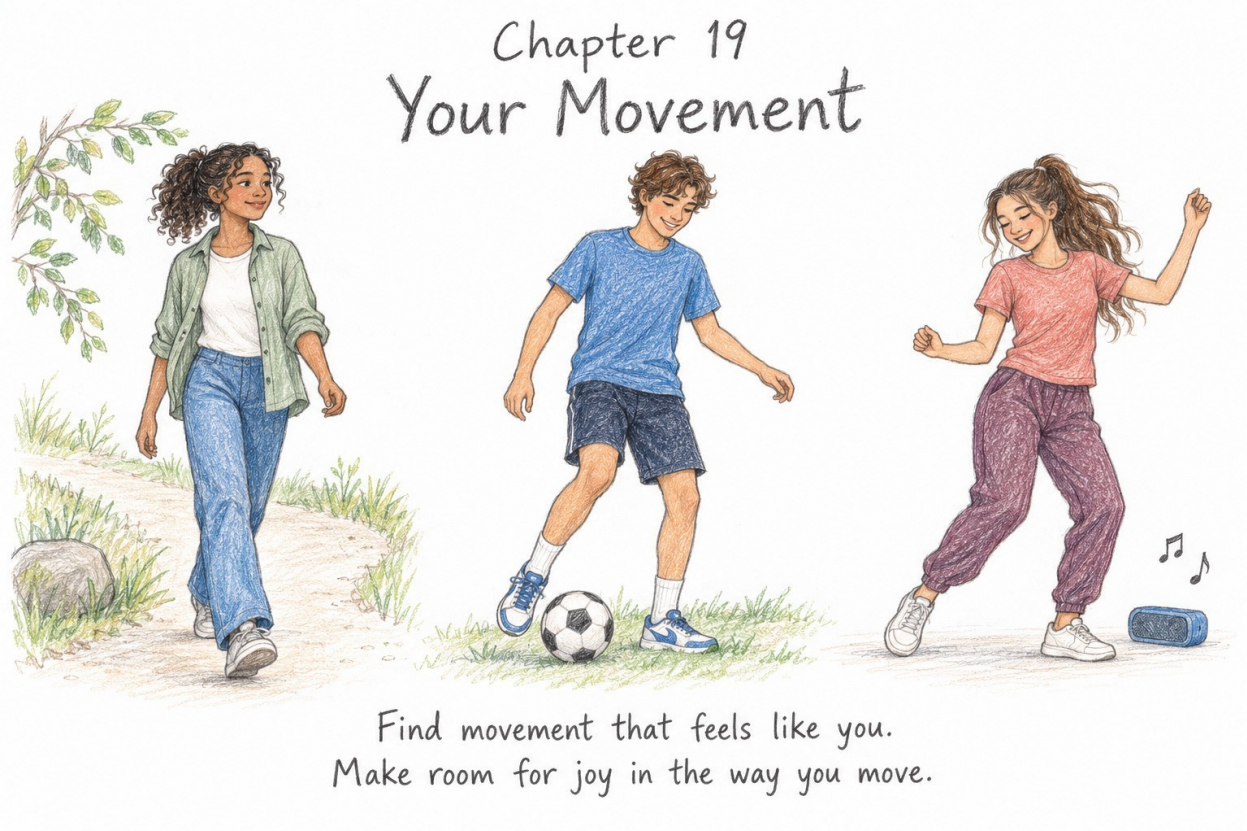
This dimension also follows you into school and early work life. Group projects, teams, clubs, part-time jobs, internships, and eventually roommates all involve figuring out how to work with people you did not personally cast for the role.

You can bring your preferences into those settings, and you can let everyone else have theirs. An Icon likes clear responsibilities. A Collector is selective about projects they join. A Wildflower contributes unexpected ideas. A Visionary gets excited about the big picture. The useful skill is being able to say what you need, listen to what somebody else needs, and find a way to work together.

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This week, think back on a few interactions without grading anybody. Where were you? Who were you with? Did the setting make talking easier or harder? Did you feel relaxed, distracted, included, talked over, energized, or ready to go home? Then pick one small thing you can control. Invite a friend for a walk. Sit somewhere quieter. Put your phone away during a conversation you care about. Ask the new person to join you. Or say no to a plan when you need a night to yourself. Designing for connection is not choosing perfect people. It is making a little more room for relationships that let everyone involved be real.

Making room for people costs almost nothing. For free, use the lounge, take a walk, leave your door open, or say yes to one invitation you would normally skip. For under $20, buy popcorn and a second cushion. If you save for one thing, make it a second chair, so nobody has to sit on your bed to talk to you. A foldable chair works well in a small room, because it slides under the bed when you do not need it, and you can make a custom cover for it out of an old concert tee to add even more personality to your room.



Exercise gets talked about like a list of numbers: miles, reps, calories, minutes, pace. That can be useful if you like tracking things, but it can also make movement feel like homework for your body. I started wondering what happens if you ask a different question: what kind of movement do I enjoy enough to keep doing?

That is where design identity can be useful. Your archetype cannot tell you which workout is scientifically best for you, and it definitely cannot diagnose what your body needs. It can give you clues about the setting, pace, structure, people, and sensory details that make moving feel more like something you chose.

For me, that is a much more interesting place to start than forcing yourself into whatever workout is popular this month.

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If you've ever dreaded one kind of workout and loved another, the difference may not be motivation. Maybe you hate being yelled at in a packed class but love playing soccer with friends. Maybe five minutes on a treadmill feels like an hour, but an hour walking outside feels like five minutes. Maybe you like a plan and progress to track. Maybe you need variety. Those preferences are worth noticing.

You do not have to love every kind of exercise. Finding movement you like, or at least do not dread, gives you a better chance of wanting to come back to it.

Soccer is mine. I have played since I was three, and I play striker, which means I spend a lot of every game trying things that do not work. The pass arrives a step late. A defender gets there first. You make a run and nobody sees it. If you stand there replaying every miss,

the next play happens without you. That is the most useful thing the sport has taught me, and it has nothing to do with fitness: disappointment deserves attention, but not the rest of your day. During the years when other parts of my life felt shaky, practice was the one place where I had to be completely present, and I think that is a big part of why I kept showing up.

I play varsity now, at a big high school, on a girls' team that has been ranked first in a highly competitive division in past years. I am proud of that, and I also know what it costs. Playing for a college team is an all day, every day commitment, and I want a college life with room in it for work and friends and everything else in this book. So I am not going to play for a college team. I am going to play club soccer instead, for the joy of it, and keep the part of the sport I love most without letting it take over the rest of my life.

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A Homebody likes movement that gets them outside or feels steady and physical: hiking, walking, yoga, gardening, or a workout in a park. Nature may be part of what makes it enjoyable.

A Visionary needs something to work toward. Training for a 5K, improving a swim time, learning a new skill, or watching progress over a season can make movement feel purposeful.

What a Mystic wants is movement that also gives them quiet: yoga, tai chi, stretching, walking without headphones, or dance that lets them get out of their head for a while.

A Wildflower gets bored doing the exact same thing every week. Dance, climbing, roller skating, pickup games, or switching between activities could make movement feel more playful.

An Icon thrives on structure and challenge: strength training, martial arts, boxing, or a program where they can practice, improve, and feel themselves getting stronger.

An Adventurer picks the version that gets them somewhere: hiking a new trail, kayaking, surfing, biking across town, or walking a neighborhood they have never explored. The experience can be part of the reason to move.

A Romantic cares about the whole experience: music they love, clothes they feel good in, a beautiful pool, a dance class, Pilates, or another kind of movement that feels fluid and enjoyable. They will not look graceful every second, and that is fine. Nobody does.

A Minimalist prefers less stimulation: a solo run, lap swimming, stretching in a quiet room, or a simple routine they can repeat without a lot of equipment or noise.

A Host shows up when other people are involved. Team sports, workout buddies, running clubs, dance classes, or intramurals can make movement social instead of another thing to do alone.

A Modernist enjoys the data side: tracking pace, reps, heart rate, or recovery with an app or watch. Numbers can be motivating if they help you learn, but they do not need to become a grade you give your body.

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What you do matters, but so does the setup around it. Think about where you move, who is there, what you hear, what you wear, and whether the whole experience makes you want to return.

Clothes are mostly about being comfortable and able to move. If an outfit also makes you feel more like yourself, great. That could mean bright shorts, an old team shirt, an all-black set, or the same giant T-shirt you have worn to practice for three years. A new workout wardrobe is not part of the requirement.

Sound can change the experience too. You might want a loud playlist for a run, silence for a walk, or friends talking during practice. Try different versions instead of assuming there is one correct workout soundtrack.

Place matters for the same reason. Some people love gyms. Some would rather be on a field, trail, court, pool deck, bedroom floor, or campus path. If one setting makes you miserable, that does not automatically mean movement itself is the problem.

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A lot of people stop moving the year they leave high school, because the sport that organized their week disappears. There is no coach, no practice at 3:30, and no teammates texting to ask where you are. I have thought about this a lot, and I ended up asking the same question I ask about a room: what do I need this to do for me? For me, soccer has to give me a team and the one hour a day when my body is busy and my head finally gets quiet. It does not have to give me a scholarship. Once I knew that, the decision was easy. Club soccer at the schools I am hoping to get into has highly competitive tryouts, so I am already looking into it now. It is a steady commitment, because you do not make the team otherwise, but it is nothing like Division One or Division Two soccer, where you essentially sign your life away for four years.

Your version does not have to be soccer, and it does not have to be a team. There is a whole ladder: varsity, club, intramural, a pickup game, a running group, or a walk you take at the same time every day. Pick the rung that fits the week you want, and ignore the one that sounds most impressive. Then set it up the way you would set up a room, so showing up is the easy part. Put the shoes by the door. Pack the bag the night before. Put practice on your calendar in the first two weeks, before classes and everything else fill the schedule without you.

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Try one kind of movement this week that sounds genuinely appealing to you. It can match your archetype, your secondary archetype, or neither. Pay attention to the part you liked or disliked: the activity, the people, the pace, the setting, the music, the competition, the quiet. That information is more useful than forcing yourself to fit a label. And if pain, injury, or a health condition affects what you can safely do, follow the advice of a qualified health professional instead of a design book.

You can do this whole chapter for almost nothing. For free, walk, take the stairs, join the pickup game, find the trail, or sign up for an intramural team. For under $20, buy a jump rope, a resistance band, or a ball. If you save for one thing, make it shoes that fit the thing you do.

Chapter 20

Your Scent



Choose scents that feel like you.
Small details can make a space feel like home.

Scent is easy to ignore until one smell suddenly brings back a whole memory. A sunscreen can remind you of summer. A certain detergent can smell like home. Someone's perfume can make you think of them before you even see them. Researchers have found especially strong connections between smell, memory, and emotion, although the brain is more complicated than the shortcut version you sometimes see online.

That made me start paying attention to scent as part of a space. Fresh air, laundry, food, shampoo, candles, plants, and even the absence of fragrance all affect what being somewhere feels like, without every room needing perfume.

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An expensive perfume or so-called signature scent is optional. If you wear fragrance, it can be another small way to express your taste. If you hate fragrance, get headaches from it, have allergies, or share space with someone who does, scent-free is a completely valid choice.

The archetypes can be fun prompts here, and that is all they are. A Homebody likes warm or earthy notes such as cedar, vanilla, or sandalwood. A Romantic is drawn to florals, soft musk, or something sweet and warm.

A Mystic goes for smoky, woody, herbal, or incense-like scents. A Visionary prefers citrus, tea, or something light and fresh. An Icon wears deeper notes such as amber, leather, or pepper.

A Wildflower keeps three fragrances and picks one by mood, instead of committing to a single signature scent. A Modernist wants something crisp and simple. A Collector is the one who discovers an unusual fragrance because of its ingredients, bottle, maker, or story.

A Host prefers warm, familiar scents that remind them of people or food. A Minimalist will choose one subtle note or no added fragrance at all. For an Adventurer, scent connects to places and memories: ocean air, pine, citrus, spices, or something picked up on a trip.

Keep track of what you like, but do not worry about whether your nose is being a perfect archetype student. Loving a scent that makes absolutely no sense on paper is completely fine.

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Home has a smell too, even when you stop registering it. Sometimes the best scent choice is not adding anything. It is opening a window, washing bedding, taking out the trash, or dealing with the mysterious gym bag in the corner before lighting a candle on top of the problem.

If you do use candles, sprays, incense, or diffusers, think about the people and animals sharing the space and follow dorm or housing rules. Fragrance can bother people with asthma, migraines, allergies, or sensory sensitivities. 'Natural' does not automatically mean harmless, and essential oils can be unsafe around some pets.

There are plenty of low-key options: fresh air, clean sheets, herbs in the kitchen, a lotion you already use, flowers, or one fragrance product you genuinely like. Layering five scents until your bedroom smells like the fragrance aisle of a department store is not an upgrade.

Your archetype can still give you ideas. A Homebody loves rosemary or the smell of something baking. Baking is also the fastest way to find out whether your roommate is home. A Romantic likes flowers. A Mystic prefers incense if it is allowed and comfortable for everyone around them. Familiar smells can become part of what makes a place feel like yours; your brain does not need to recognize an archetype for that to happen.

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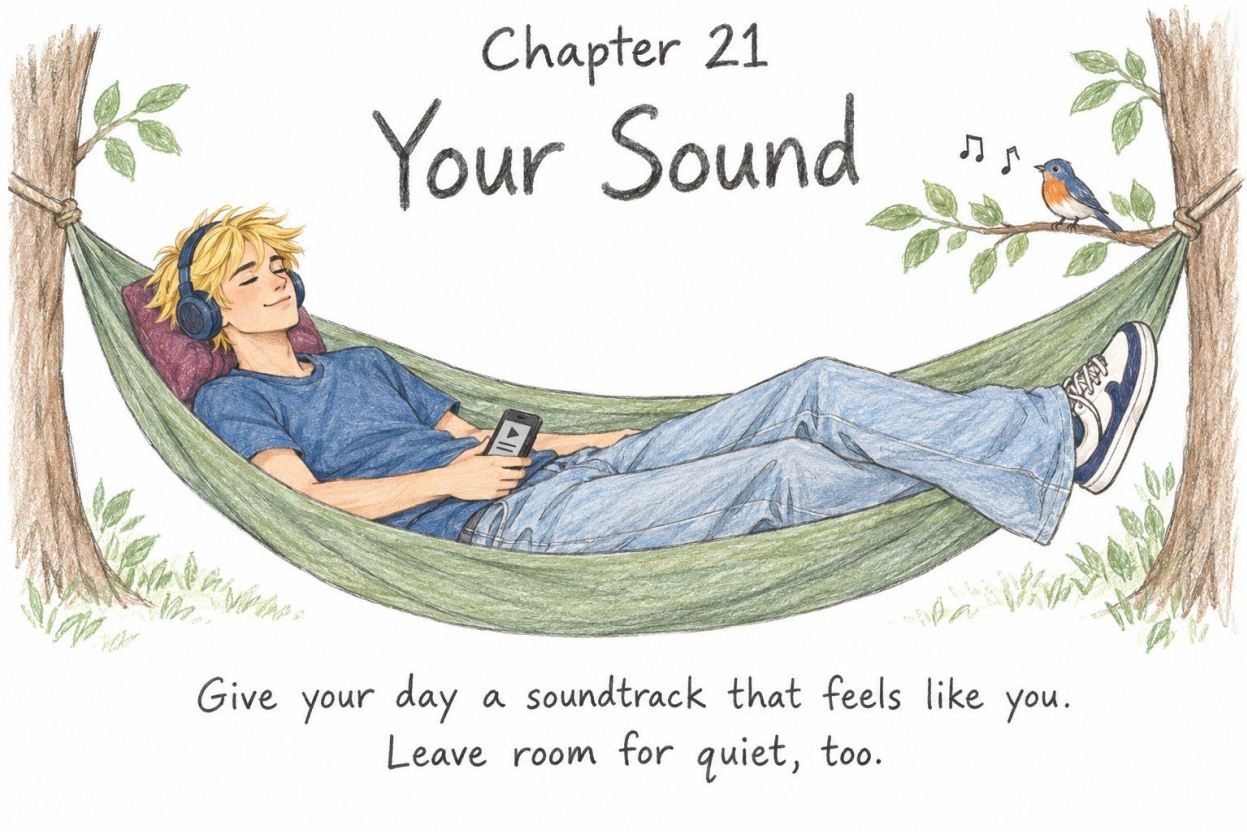
Scent can also become connected to routines. Maybe you use the same lotion before bed, make peppermint tea while studying, or wear a certain fragrance when you go out. After a while, familiar smells can become associated with familiar moments.

Research on memory and learning suggests that odors can become cues because our brains form associations between smells and experiences. That is interesting, but it is not a magic mood switch. Think of scent as one small cue among many, and leave the remote control for your brain to science fiction.

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This week, pick one scent you already like. It might be your shampoo, coffee, clean laundry, a plant, rain, or a fragrance you wear. Ask yourself what you like about it and where it makes sense in your life. If you want to try something new, smell it first and start small. You may discover that your best scent design is a candle. You may discover it is an open window. Both count.

Scent is cheap to experiment with. For free, open the window, wash the sheets, take out the trash, or deal with the gym bag. For under $20, buy a bar of soap you like, a plant that smells like something (basil, rosemary, or mint), or one candle if candles are allowed where you live. If you save for one thing, make it one fragrance you tested on your own skin for a whole day. Ten seconds in the store aisle tells you nothing.



Close your eyes for a second and listen. What do you hear right now? A fan? Traffic? Your roommate on FaceTime? Music from somebody else's room? Maybe, somehow, silence?

Sound is easy to ignore until it gets annoying. I started noticing it while working on this book because the same desk can feel completely different depending on whether I'm hearing music I chose, nonstop notifications, or a noise I can't tune out.

That's what I mean by your sound dimension. Music is part of it, but so are voices, alarms, traffic, roommates, headphones, silence, and all the background sounds that follow you through a normal day.

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Music is the easiest place to experiment because you can change it in seconds. A song can make getting ready more fun, help a workout feel less boring, or make a late-night study session way more distracting. The effect is personal, though. The playlist that helps your friend focus might make you want to sing every word instead of reading anything.

Instead of assuming there is one perfect soundtrack, figure out what works for you. What do you play when you want to wake up? Focus? Draw? Clean your room? Calm down after practice? And when is silence better?

The archetypes can give you ideas, but they do not come with official genres. A Homebody likes acoustic music or warm, familiar songs. A Visionary leans toward electronic or atmospheric music that feels open and new. Or they like completely different music. The feeling matters more than matching a label to a Spotify category.

A Romantic saves songs for the emotion in them: piano, soul, pop, jazz, strings, or a voice that gives them chills. A Mystic prefers quieter or more atmospheric sounds when they want to think. Neither one has to listen to a particular genre to qualify.

An Icon wants music that makes them feel focused or strong. A Wildflower has a playlist that jumps from one decade and genre to another with absolutely no apology. Those are possibilities, and you are free to ignore all of them.

A Collector loves making playlists around a mood, discovering artists, or listening to a whole album instead of whatever the algorithm serves next. Choosing carefully is part of the fun, and it proves nothing about taste.

An Alchemist is the person mixing songs that seem unrelated until somehow the playlist works. If your music taste makes no sense on paper but makes perfect sense to you, that counts too.

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It can also help to think about sound by situation instead of trying to invent one soundtrack for your entire personality.

Getting ready: what makes the morning easier? Maybe upbeat music helps you move. Maybe you need quiet until you've been awake for ten minutes. Both are valid.

Studying or working: test it. Lyrics help some people and distract others. Instrumental music, background noise, headphones, or silence might work better depending on what you're doing. If you are writing an essay, your best setup might be different from when you are drawing or organizing files.

Cooking, cleaning, or resetting your room: this is where music can make a boring task less boring. A fifteen-minute playlist can even give the task a beginning and an end. If the playlist ends and the room is not clean, you are allowed to sit down anyway.

Winding down: if loud music keeps you awake, try something softer or turn it off. If silence makes every hallway noise in your dorm suddenly fascinating, quiet background sound might be better. Pay attention to your own response.

Four perfect playlists would be overkill. One useful one is enough to start.

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Sound design also includes the sounds you can reduce.

Notification pings, a buzzing light, the TV nobody is watching, and three videos playing from three phones in the same room all add up. Some sounds are outside your control, especially in a dorm, apartment, city, or family home. But a few can be changed, muted, moved, or blocked with headphones.

Silence can be useful too. Some studies suggest that noise can affect attention and stress, but people respond differently and the task matters. I like thinking of quiet as another option instead of treating constant background sound as the default.

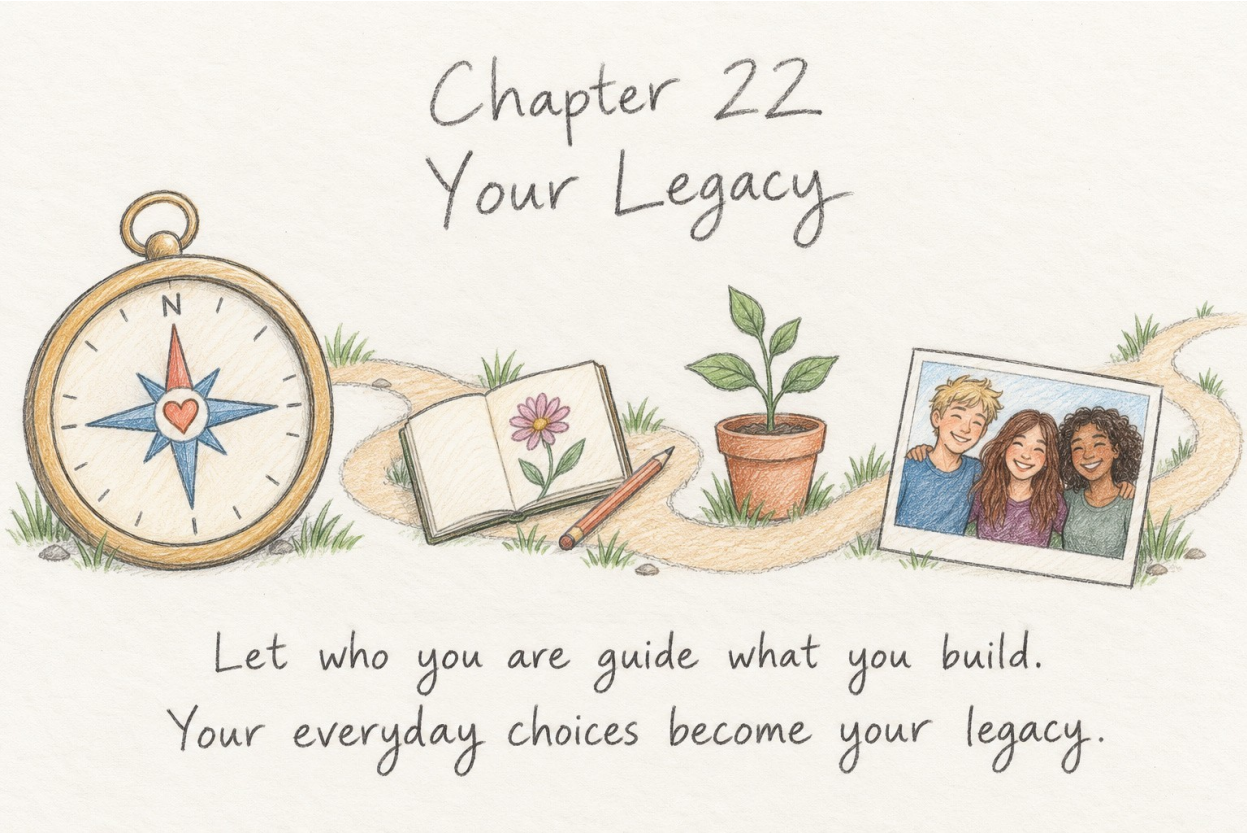
Nature sounds are another option. Research has found that some natural sounds may support relaxation or restoration for some people. That could mean opening a window and hearing actual birds, sitting outside, or using a rain or ocean track when the real thing is not available. If it helps, use it. If fake rain makes you need the bathroom, maybe skip that one.

If you share a room, make the noise agreement in the first week, before the first 6 a.m. alarm. Four questions cover most of it: what time do alarms stop being okay, when do headphones become mandatory, what happens when one person is asleep and the other is not, and what is the signal for 'I need quiet right now.' Earplugs and a fan or a white noise track solve a surprising amount of the rest. The agreement works because you make it in a calm week, long before anyone is angry at 6 a.m.

• • •

Try one sound experiment this week. Make a short playlist for something you do all the time, or turn off one background noise you normally ignore. Use the new setup a few times and see what happens. Do you focus better? Feel less distracted? Enjoy the task more? Or miss the old sound? That answer is more useful than any archetype rule. Your sound should work for your actual ears and your actual life.

Sound is a cheap problem to solve. For free, try silence, an open window, a playlist, or turning off the one notification you never needed. For under $20, buy foam earplugs and a small fan. If you save for one thing, make it headphones that cancel the hallway.



This is the last of the twelve dimensions, and the word legacy sounds way more serious than most of this book. It can make you picture someone at the end of a long career looking back on everything they built. At seventeen, that feels pretty far away.

So I use the word more simply. Legacy can also mean what you leave with people, places, projects, and communities while you are still in the middle of becoming yourself. It can be a tradition you start with friends, something you make, a younger kid you help, a team you make better, or an idea somebody keeps using after you leave.

That makes this dimension less about designing some giant life plan and more about noticing what matters enough that you want to contribute to it.

• • •

Your archetype can be one way to think about that, but it cannot tell you what your purpose is. These are prompts. Predictions are above my pay grade.

A Visionary cares about starting something new or helping other people imagine what could be better. That could be a club, an app, an art project, a new way of doing something at school, or an idea that is still scribbled in a notebook.

A Homebody leaves things better through care: keeping a friendship strong, growing food, helping make a home welcoming, teaching someone a skill, or being the person others can count on.

A Collector preserves things that could otherwise disappear: photos, family stories, playlists, art, objects, interviews, or a record of something their community cares about.

A Romantic contributes through beauty and feeling: making art, celebrating people, noticing details, creating traditions, or making ordinary moments feel special.

Standards and responsibility matter to an Icon. They improve how a team works, organize something that was chaotic, lead a project well, or show younger students what good leadership can look like.

A Mystic is drawn to reflection, meaning, faith, spirituality, or simply making room for questions that do not have fast answers. That can show up privately or in what they share with other people.

An Adventurer shares curiosity: bringing back stories, trying unfamiliar things, learning from places and people, or encouraging friends to explore beyond what they already know.

A Host builds belonging. They are the person who starts the group chat, remembers who has not been invited yet, keeps a tradition going, or makes a new person feel less new.

A Modernist improves a system that is unnecessarily difficult. They make a better spreadsheet, organize a club process, build a cleaner website, or find a smarter way to solve an everyday problem. Somewhere a club is still running on a spreadsheet a Modernist made years ago, long after that Modernist graduated.

A Minimalist's contribution comes through attention and meaning. A photograph, a few carefully chosen words, a simple space, or one thoughtful conversation can matter even when it stays small and private.

An Alchemist takes something overlooked and turns it into something new: an old object, an unfinished idea, a thrift-store find, a school assignment, or two interests nobody else thought to combine.

• • •

Step back from the twelve dimensions for a second. What keeps showing up across the things you care about?

Maybe you keep making things. Maybe you are always the one bringing people together. Maybe you care about animals, sports, design, fairness, music, the environment, technology, or helping younger kids. Maybe you do not know yet. At seventeen or twenty, not knowing is completely reasonable.

Your life does not need one perfect theme connecting your room, clothes, friends, future career, and entire personality. That would be a lot of pressure to put on a design book. Look for patterns if they are useful, and leave room to change.

The twelve dimensions were never supposed to make every part of your life match. They were a reason to look more closely. What feels like you? What works? What do you want to keep, change, try, or care about more? Those answers can evolve as fast as you do.

• • •

One thing I like about design is that choices can travel. A friend might copy the way you hung photos without damaging the wall. Your roommate might keep the little dinner tradition

you started. Someone might borrow your thrift-store idea, playlist, study setup, or way of making people feel welcome.

You are not responsible for inspiring everyone around you. Sometimes the effect is tiny and you never even see it. You make something useful, kind, interesting, or beautiful, and another person carries a piece of it forward.

That is enough of a legacy for now. You do not have to know what you will be remembered for. You can just practice leaving things a little better, more useful, more interesting, or more human than you found them.

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Try this: write one sentence about something you want to add to the world around you right now. Keep it small enough to be real. Maybe: I want people to feel included around me. I want to make spaces that help people relax. I want to make things instead of only consuming them. I want to be the teammate who notices who needs help.

Put the sentence somewhere you can find it later. It is not a five-year plan or a permanent identity. Think of it as a snapshot of what matters to you now. Rewrite it whenever it stops fitting.

Here is mine, as a snapshot. I keep making things for the person I used to be. This book is for the kid in the giant sweatshirt who needed permission to like what she liked. My other project, MiddleSchoolMoney.com, is for the kid I was at thirteen. My school did not teach financial literacy until senior year, which is too late, because money habits start forming around thirteen. I got my first real paycheck as a lifeguard at fifteen, and I did not understand what had been taken out of it or how to be responsible with what was left. I started babysitting at eleven and learned most of what I know about money by trial and error, so I built something for the kids who are about to make the same mistakes. And I would love, someday, to make my work available in Portuguese, the language I dropped at four and still miss. I stopped speaking it to blend in, and now I want to make room for every part of who I am. None of that is a life plan. It is what keeps showing up, and noticing it has made it easier to decide what gets my time.

Legacy costs nothing. Starting a tradition, keeping a group chat alive, passing a plant cutting to a friend, or teaching someone something you know are all free. If you spend anything, spend it on a frame for the photo that matters or a notebook for the one sentence you just wrote. There is nothing to save up for here.

• • •

That's all twelve dimensions. They are not a twelve-part redesign assignment, and having yourself figured out is not the price of entry. Part Four is only two chapters. It is about taking all these ideas and making one small choice in real life.

So let's start there.

PART FOUR

Go



You've read 22 chapters, which is a lot. You know the archetypes, you've seen the 12 dimensions, and you probably have a few ideas for your room, closet, phone, desk, routines, or whatever else kept making you stop and think.

You can leave most of those ideas alone for now.

Trying all of them at once is a pretty good way to turn a book you liked into a project you avoid. You make a list, open twelve tabs, start three shopping carts, and somehow your room looks worse than it did before.

So make this easier: start with one thing.

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Do not redo your whole room, rebuild your wardrobe, fix every routine, clean your phone, buy plants, and make four new playlists this weekend. Pick the part of daily life that is bothering you most, or the part you are most curious to test.

Maybe your desk is so crowded that you avoid sitting there. Maybe your closet is full but getting dressed still takes forever. Maybe your dorm room feels temporary because nothing in it is yours yet. Maybe your phone is full of old photos, apps, and saved posts you do not even care about anymore.

Choose one of those things. Then make one change. Ten changes would be a renovation.

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If Adventurer fits you, finally put up a photo, ticket, map, or little object from a place you loved instead of leaving it in a drawer.

If you connect with Alchemist, change something you already own: paint a thrifted frame, switch a lamp shade, turn an old jar into storage, or use something in a way it was not originally meant for.

If Host fits, clear enough floor or seating space for two friends to hang out, add snacks, and stop waiting for a 'perfect' room before inviting anyone over.

If Collector fits you, choose three things that matter to you and display them together instead of letting every shelf become random storage.

For a Minimalist experiment, clear one surface and leave some of it empty. No new organizer required.

For a Modernist experiment, deal with the cords under the desk, make one charging spot, or clean up the laptop desktop so finding a file does not become a side quest.

If Mystic fits, try making one quiet corner with a journal, a meaningful object, softer light, or whatever helps you slow down for a few minutes.

If Romantic fits, put a grocery-store flower in a glass, use the nice pillowcase, hang a photo you love, or make the room a little softer with something you already have.

If Visionary fits, put one current goal, project, sketch, or idea where you can see it instead of letting it disappear into a notes app.

For a Wildflower experiment, finally hang the art leaning against the wall, add the color you kept talking yourself out of, or mix in one thrifted thing that makes the room less generic.

If Icon fits, reset the desk, repair or clean something you use constantly, or choose one sturdy piece that solves a real problem instead of buying a pile of decor.

If Homebody fits, try one plant, a tiny herb pot if the light works, or a natural texture you already know you like.

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Then live with the change for a few days. See whether it helps, annoys you, gets ignored, or makes you want to adjust something else. You are collecting information. The archetype is not on trial.

Sometimes one change does lead to another, but it does not have to. You might clear the desk and realize the lighting is the real problem. You might hang the art and decide the rest of the wall can stay blank. You might try a plant and learn that you would rather have the window open than remember a watering schedule.

That is how a space gets more personal: try something, live with it, keep what works, and change what does not. Skip the makeover and shopping spree. Pay just enough attention to tell what is helping.

• • •

Since I keep telling you to start with one thing, here is what I did in my own room in the fall of my senior year, in the order it happened.

I started with the bed. A plain white frame, new bedding, and a rug changed the room more than anything else I had done in two years. Then I took down the tree shaped shelf with branches that held my books, which I loved when I was younger and had stopped seeing by then. That was the moment the room started belonging to the current me.

Then came the dressers I told you about in Chapter 4, keeping my dad's flowers and painting the pink legs white. Then came the clothes, which turned into the pile on my brother's bed from Chapter 4 and the closet edit from Chapter 12.

What is left is the wall. The last time I put art up was two years ago, and I am a very different person than I was then, which is a strange thing to discover from a poster. I do not know yet what goes there. I know it will not be something I saw four hundred times online, and I know I will probably get it wrong once first. That is fine by me. By the time I leave for college, all of this becomes practice for a dorm room I have not seen, with a roommate I have not met. I will post how it turns out at room2flourish.com.

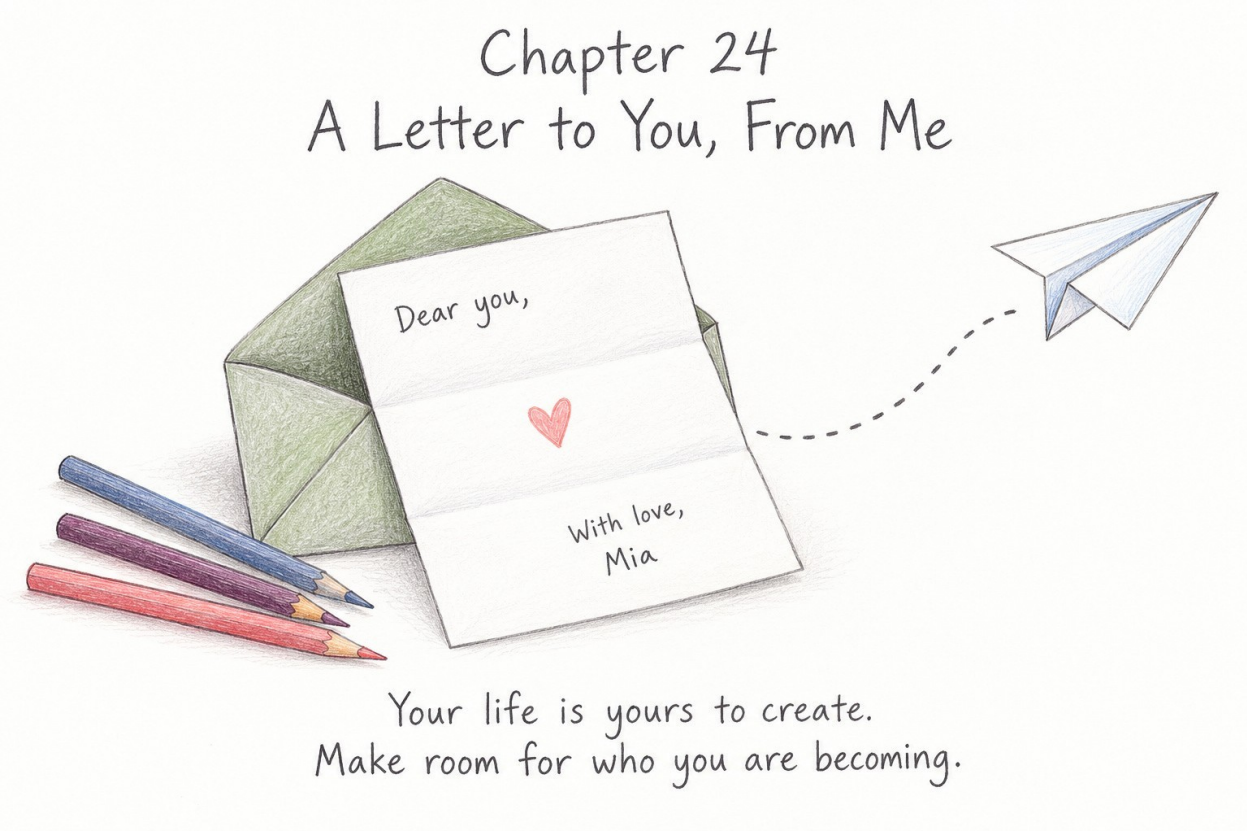
• • •

Also, caring about this does not have to become a huge statement about who you are.

You can care that your room feels good when you come home, that your clothes are comfortable, that your desk is usable, that your playlist makes practice more fun, or that a weird little lamp from a thrift store makes you happy. Those things are part of everyday life, so they are worth paying attention to.

Design is not important because everything has to be beautiful. It matters because you live with these choices over and over. A small change that makes schoolwork easier, a shared room less annoying, or a normal Tuesday nicer has already done something useful.

So pick one thing and try it. Use what you have first. Give it a few days. Then decide what you learned.



Hey.

We made it. You are either very committed or you skipped to the end, and I respect both.

I wanted the last chapter to feel less like another lesson and more like a note from me to you, because after 23 chapters I think we can drop the formal ending.

• • •

When I started writing this book, I kept wondering whether someone would read it and think, who is this 17-year-old to write a book about design? That is a fair question. I do not have years of client projects behind me, and I am not going to write as if I do.

What I do have is a brain that has been paying attention to rooms for as long as I can remember, a lot of curiosity, a lot of research, and a habit of testing ideas in my own spaces and talking them through with friends and family.

Writing this book taught me that I can pay attention, ask better questions, and share what I found before I know everything. Same goes for design.

That is really why I wrote this book.

I also have the years I talked about at the start of this book, the ones I kept a little blurry on purpose. I did not write this from the far side of a perfect life. I wrote it from a room I like, in a life that is a lot better than it was at thirteen, and the difference was not that everything hard got fixed. Some of it did. Some of it did not. The difference is that somewhere in the middle of it I stopped spending all my attention on fitting in and started paying attention to

what I liked, what I needed, and who I could relax around. Design was the first place I practiced that. It turned out to be practice for everything else.

If you are in a hard stretch right now, you can start with something small, right in front of you, while the rest of life is still complicated. That is what I did, and it is the main reason I believe the rest of this book.

• • •

I think our surroundings matter. Not because a lamp can fix a bad week or the right outfit can turn you into a different person. They matter because we spend so much time inside rooms, clothes, screens, routines, sounds, and all the tiny things that make up a normal day. When some of those things work better for you, daily life can feel easier and more personal.

I also think taste gets more interesting when you stop treating it like a test. The archetypes are not supposed to tell you who you are. They are there to help you see patterns: what you keep choosing, what you avoid, what makes you comfortable, what makes you curious, and what you want more or less of around you.

Changing your mind is part of it. The room you love at 17 might make no sense to you at 21. Your first apartment might look nothing like your bedroom at home. A roommate, a new city, a new job, a new budget, or just getting bored can change what you need.

Changing preferences does not mean you got your design identity wrong. That flexibility is kind of the reason to keep paying attention in the first place.

• • •

When you close this book, I hope you look around once before you open another app. Look at the room, dorm, desk, closet, or corner you are in. Find one thing you like about it. Then find the thing you keep wishing were different.

Maybe you will change something tonight because you already know what you want to try.

Maybe you will leave everything alone for a while and start noticing patterns first.

Maybe you will send an archetype description to a friend and argue about whether it sounds like either of you.

Maybe you will make an inspiration folder and finally delete half the images because you realize you only liked one tiny detail in each one.

Or maybe you will ignore every example in this book and come up with something better for your own space. I would love that.

There is no correct speed and no prize for changing the most things. Keep what is useful. Drop what is not. Change your mind whenever you need to.

• • •

You can start with the free archetype quiz at room2flourish.com. But a quiz result is not a requirement. You can begin by looking at what is already around you and how you respond to it.

That is the part I hope stays with you after the book is closed: your surroundings are not completely fixed, even when your budget, dorm rules, parents, roommates, or lease give you limits. There is usually some small choice that can feel more like yours.

• • •

As for me, I am about to become a reader of this book. As I write this, I am a few months from carrying two boxes into a dorm room I have not seen, trying out for a club soccer team, making a noise agreement with a roommate I have not met, and finding out which of my own advice holds up. I will post what works and what does not at room2flourish.com, because the real version is more useful than the polished one. If this book helped you with even one corner of one room, then it did its job. And if you want to tell me about your corner, or ask me about yours, write to me at mia@room2flourish.com. I would love to hear from you.

• • •

Back in Chapter 1, I asked you to look around and answer one question: does this space feel like me? I still think that is one of the best questions in the book.

Your answer does not have to be yes all the time. It probably will not be. But now you have more ways to figure out what feels off, what feels right, and what you want to try next.

Make your space useful. Make it personal. Let it change when you do.

And do not wait for more money, a better apartment, or your whole life to be figured out first.

Start with where you are. Change one thing. See what you learn.

• • •

With love,

Mia

THE BACK OF THE BOOK

Keep This Part Handy

The 12 Archetypes at a Glance

Chapter 7 on one page, for when your phone is at four percent.

Archetype	In a line	What feeds you	What drains you	Dorm version
The Visionary	Future-focused, bright, possibility-driven	Daylight, open surfaces, new ideas, clean starts, room to think	Dark cluttered rooms, stale routines, copying a look just because everyone else is doing it	Keep the desk clear, take the bed by the window if you can, and let one bright object stand out.
The Homebody	Warm, tactile, grounded	Natural materials, warmth, familiar objects, handmade pieces, things that age well	Cold lighting, flimsy finishes, spaces that feel too polished to relax in	Bring one real blanket, swap the overhead light for a warm lamp, and add something thrifted and wooden, even if it is only a tray.
The Mystic	Reflective, symbolic, drawn to meaning	Privacy, ritual, symbolism, soft light, objects with personal meaning	Glare, noise, purely functional spaces, decor that feels random or empty	Use a low lamp, give one shelf to objects that mean something, and claim a corner that is yours alone, even if it is two feet wide.
The Collector	Observant, selective, every piece has a reason	Art, craft, history, meaningful finds, collections that tell a story	Filler decor, random trend purchases, objects that take up space but mean nothing to you	Put three things with stories on the one shelf you control, and keep the rest in a box until it earns a spot.
The Wildflower	Free-spirited, expressive, happily imperfect	Color, plants, music, texture, freedom, handmade things, a little beautiful chaos	Rigid rules, perfectly matched sets, rooms where nothing can move or change	Use removable hooks, cover your half of the wall with art, line the windowsill with plants, and pick a bedspread that clashes with the carpet on purpose.
The Icon	Polished, clear, quietly powerful	Order, quality, symmetry, clear surfaces, strong shapes, things that feel well made	Visual chaos, things that fall apart fast, clutter with nowhere to go, spaces that feel unfinished	Choose matching storage, make the bed, hide the cords, and add one bold piece so the room looks decided instead of issued.
The Alchemist	Inventive, resourceful, sees possibilities everywhere	Thrifting, transformation, mixing old and new, creative problem-solving, seeing potential	Buying everything as a matching set, waste, being told there is only one correct way to do something	Treat the ugly dorm furniture as raw material. Put peel and stick vinyl on the desk, give a thrift lamp a new shade, and turn the awkward corner into the best seat.
The Minimalist	Quiet, edited, beauty in the essential	Space, quiet, simple routines, useful objects, visual breathing room	Visual noise, piles without a home, too many competing colors, decor that feels busy for no reason	Bring half of what you packed, keep the surfaces empty, and spend the money on good bedding and one lamp.
The Host	Warm, social, built for connection	Friends, hosting, comfort, shared food, flexible seating, spaces that make people linger	Stiff rooms, nowhere comfortable to sit, fragile setups, spaces that make everyone whisper	Keep floor cushions, a stack of mugs, and snacks within reach, and leave the door open more often than it is closed.
The Modernist	Clean, current, design-aware	Innovation, clean lines, useful technology, contemporary art, clever solutions	Fussy details, clutter, fake-old finishes, too many competing objects	Set up one charging spot, clip on a lamp with warm light, hide the cords, and hang a single big print instead of six small ones.
The Romantic	Soft, expressive, detail-loving	Beauty, softness, flowers, candlelight or warm lamps, small details, sensory comfort	Harsh lighting, cold rooms, everything chosen only for function, spaces with no softness	Choose soft bedding in a color you love, find a secondhand mirror, hang warm string lights, and keep something alive or flowering on the desk.
The Adventurer	Curious, bold, drawn to discovery	Travel, curiosity, craft, stories, new places, learning where things come from	Rooms with no story, copy-and-paste decor, objects chosen only because they look 'worldly'	Hang a map with pins and photos from everywhere you have been, and keep one object from home that tells a story when someone asks.

The 24 Experiments

Every chapter ends with one thing to try. Here they all are in one place, so you can see what you have done and what you have been avoiding. The ones you keep skipping are usually the ones worth doing.

☐ Look around and answer three questions: what here makes me happy, what belongs to an older me, and would this room help me after a bad day? (Chapter 1)

☐ Answer the five kid questions in your notes app, fast, before you can give the right answer. (Chapter 2)

☐ Pick one thing you want more of, like sleep, calm, art, or friends over, and change one cue in the room to support it. (Chapter 3)

☐ Go through one shelf, one section of the closet, or one folder on your phone and sort it: use, love, need, or gone. (Chapter 4)

☐ Open your saved inspiration and ask what exactly you liked about each image. Delete the ones where the answer is 'it looked expensive.' (Chapter 5)

☐ Say your style label out loud. Then say what you want the room to feel like. The gap between those two answers is what the archetypes are for. (Chapter 6)

☐ Read all twelve archetypes. Decide nothing for a week. (Chapter 7)

☐ Write your primary and your secondary in pencil. (Chapter 8)

☐ Answer the three roommate questions out loud with the person you live with, or alone, for yourself. (Chapter 9)

☐ Pick the one dimension you keep noticing. Start there and nowhere else. (Chapter 10)

☐ Turn off the overhead light, plug in a lamp, and look at the room again. (Chapter 11)

☐ Pull out ten pieces you like wearing and find what they have in common. (Chapter 12)

☐ Check the light in your room, then get one plant that can live in it. Or spend ten minutes outside without your phone. (Chapter 13)

☐ Clear the desk until you can see the surface. Put back only what you use, plus one thing you love. (Chapter 14)

☐ Give one public profile a fifteen minute reset: photo, bio, links, privacy. Then look at it logged out. (Chapter 15)

☐ Eat one meal from the mug or bowl you like, in a cleared spot, with one thing changed about the light or the sound. (Chapter 16)

☐ Change one small part of a routine you already have: keys in one place, clothes out the night before, five quiet minutes. (Chapter 17)

☐ Invite one person for a walk, or move a conversation you care about somewhere quieter. (Chapter 18)

☐ Try one kind of movement that sounds appealing and notice which part you liked: the people, the pace, or the place. (Chapter 19)

☐ Pick one scent you already like and figure out where it belongs in your day. Or open the window. (Chapter 20)

☐ Make a fifteen minute playlist for one task, or turn off one notification you never needed. (Chapter 21)

☐ Write one sentence about what you want to add to the world around you. Keep it small enough to be real. (Chapter 22)

☐ Pick the one thing in your space that bothers you most and change it. Live with it for three days. (Chapter 23)

☐ Before you open another app, look around once and find one thing you like about the room. (Chapter 24)

The Fourteen Day Version

If you are moving next month, or you just want two weeks that feel different, here is the whole book in fourteen small moves. Do one a day. Skip a day if you need to. There is no penalty for skipping.

Day 1: Answer the three questions from Chapter 1 and write the answers down.

Day 2: Take the quiz at room2flourish.com, then read all twelve descriptions anyway.

Day 3: Write your primary and secondary, in pencil.

Day 4: Fix the light. Turn the overhead off, turn a lamp on, and look again.

Day 5: Clear the chair, and clear one spot where another person can sit.

Day 6: Lay ten pieces you like wearing side by side and find the pattern.

Day 7: Get one plant that can live in your light, or spend ten minutes outside without your phone.

Day 8: Clear the desk down to the surface.

Day 9: Give one profile fifteen minutes, then look at it logged out.

Day 10: Eat one meal from the good mug, in a cleared spot.

Day 11: Change one tiny part of one routine.

Day 12: Take one walk with one person.

Day 13: Open the window, make the playlist, and turn off one notification.

Day 14: Look around and ask whether this feels like you. Then write the one sentence from Chapter 22.

Keep Going

The free twelve question archetype quiz is at room2flourish.com. It takes two or three minutes and gives you a starting archetype plus a second one to explore.

If the free quiz got you curious, the Deep Dive is the long version: a 48 question questionnaire, including a few about the actual room you are working on, that turns into a personalized report built around your blend and your space.

If you want to take it further, the 45 minute one on one call is where we go over your report together and fine tune it until it fits you. Bring the report, a few photos of the room, and the thing you are stuck on.

Both are at room2flourish.com. And if all you ever do is the free quiz and one experiment, that is a complete version of this book.

Where This Comes From

I promised in the introduction that the research words in this book are there because they are useful, and sounding impressive was never the reason. Here is where the main ideas come from, in plain English, with the caveats. I checked every one of these before it went on this page. Where a famous study has not held up when other researchers tried to repeat it, I say so, because that is the kind of thing I would want to know.

Rooms, mood, and stress (Chapter 1). Sixty adults gave recorded tours of their own homes. The ones who described their homes with words about clutter and unfinished projects, especially the women in the study, had flatter daily cortisol patterns and more low mood across the day than the ones who described their homes as restful and natural. It shows a correlation, which is not proof, and the people in it were married adults, so take the teenager part with a grain of salt. It is still the clearest study I found that the words you would use for your room track with how your body handles a day. Saxbe, D. E., and Repetti, R. (2010). No place like home: Home tours correlate with daily patterns of mood and cortisol. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 36(1), 71 to 81.

Neuroaesthetics (Introduction, Chapter 1). The field that studies how brains respond to art, objects, and environments. The review I leaned on most: Chatterjee, A., and Vartanian, O. (2014). Neuroaesthetics. Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 18(7), 370 to 375.

Enclothed cognition and the lab coat (Chapters 1 and 12). In the original experiments, people wearing a white coat they were told was a doctor's coat made fewer attention errors than people in their own clothes or people told it was a painter's coat. Adam, H., and Galinsky, A. D. (2012). Enclothed cognition. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48(4), 918 to 925. The caveat: a preregistered attempt to repeat the main experiment did not find the effect. Burns, D. M., and colleagues (2019). An old task in new clothes. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 83, 150 to 156. The original authors answered with a review of the wider evidence, Horton, C. B., Adam, H., and Galinsky, A. D. (2023), in Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. That is why this book treats the lab coat as an idea worth testing on yourself rather than a law.

Embodied cognition (Chapter 3). The idea that thinking is tied to what the body is doing and sensing. A readable overview: Wilson, M. (2002). Six views of embodied cognition. Psychonomic Bulletin and Review, 9(4), 625 to 636.

Places and memory (Chapter 4). The famous one is the scuba study, where divers remembered word lists better in the place they learned them, on land or underwater. Godden, D. R., and Baddeley, A. D. (1975). British Journal of Psychology, 66(3), 325 to 331. A 2021 attempt to repeat it, by Murre in Royal Society Open Science, did not find the effect, so the safer source is the review that pooled dozens of studies and found the place effect is real but small: Smith, S. M., and Vela, E. (2001). Environmental context dependent memory: A review and meta analysis. Psychonomic Bulletin and Review, 8(2), 203 to 220. Small is enough for the point in Chapter 4: a room can hold old cues, and new cues help.

Visual clutter and attention (Chapters 1, 11, and 14). When several things are in view at once, they compete for the brain's limited processing and suppress each other. McMains, S., and Kastner, S. (2011). Interactions of top down and bottom up mechanisms in human visual cortex. Journal of Neuroscience, 31(2), 587 to 597.

Noise (Chapter 21). Three hours of low level office noise raised stress hormone levels and made people give up sooner on hard puzzles compared with a quiet room. Evans, G. W., and Johnson, D. (2000). Stress and open office noise. Journal of Applied Psychology, 85(5), 779 to 783.

Nature, attention, and biophilia (Chapter 13). Attention restoration theory: Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 15(3), 169 to 182. The walk study, where a walk through trees improved attention scores more than a walk downtown: Berman, M. G., Jonides, J., and Kaplan, S. (2008). The cognitive benefits of interacting with nature. Psychological Science, 19(12), 1207 to 1212. The hospital window study, where patients with a view of nature went home sooner than patients facing a brick wall: Ulrich, R. S. (1984). View through a window may influence recovery from surgery. Science, 224(4647), 420 to 421. The word biophilia comes from Wilson, E. O. (1984). Biophilia. Harvard University Press.

Sleep, light, screens, and the bed (Chapters 11, 14, and 17). Reading on a backlit screen before bed, compared with a printed book, made people slower to fall asleep, lowered melatonin, and left them less alert the next morning. Chang, A. M., Aeschbach, D., Duffy, J. F., and Czeisler, C. A. (2015). Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 112(4), 1232 to 1237. The bed is for sleeping rule is older than any of us: Bootzin, R. R. (1972). Stimulus control treatment for insomnia. Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, 7, 395 to 396. For the plain language guidance on consistent schedules and light, I used the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's sleep pages at cdc.gov/sleep and the National Institute of General Medical Sciences fact sheet on circadian rhythms at nigms.nih.gov.

Smell and memory (Chapter 20). Memories brought up by a smell tend to feel more emotional than the same memories brought up by a picture or a sound. Herz, R. S. (2004). A naturalistic analysis of autobiographical memories triggered by olfactory, visual and auditory stimuli. Chemical Senses, 29, 217 to 224. Her book for regular people: Herz, R. S. (2007). The Scent of Desire. William Morrow.

Archetypes (Chapter 6). The idea I borrowed and then rebuilt for design: Jung, C. G. The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 9, Part 1. Princeton University Press, 1968 edition. My twelve are a design tool rather than psychology, and Jung would probably have notes.

Pet safe plants (Chapter 13). Every plant in Chapter 13 was checked against the ASPCA list of plants that are toxic and nontoxic to cats, dogs, and horses, at aspca.org under Animal Poison Control. If a pet eats something on the wrong list, the ASPCA Poison Control line is 888 426 4435, and there is a fee.

The numbers in Chapter 11. The 57 inch center for hanging art, the rug under the front legs of the furniture, and three light sources per room are working conventions from galleries and designers rather than research. The 57 inch rule is the one many museums and galleries use because it lands close to average eye level. The rest I measured in my own room until it felt right, which is also a method.

About the Author

Mia Bukow wrote this book at seventeen, during her senior year of high school, the year before she left for college. She has been designing rooms since she turned a storage closet into a playroom at eight. She plays soccer, runs a small Depop shop, built the 12 Design Archetypes at room2flourish.com, and started MiddleSchoolMoney.com to teach younger kids about money before the bad habits begin. You can reach her at mia@room2flourish.com.