

Ep #24: The Link Between Interior Design and Self-Care for Introverts



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With Your Host

Rachel Cannon

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Welcome to *Loudmouth Introvert*, a podcast for helping creative introverted entrepreneurs thrive, despite living in a world that's designed for extroverts to succeed. If you're ready to make more money and build the creative business you've been dreaming of, you're in the right place. I'm your host Rachel Cannon.

Have you heard that life begins at 40? For years I heard that, and I would think, what is the big secret that is going to be revealed to me when I turn 40 and why can't I just find it out now? Well, now that I'm 40, and about to turn 41, I know why. Because the revelation is different for everyone. For me, it was all about embracing what it means for me to be an introvert, a creative, and an entrepreneur. My 40th year was dotted with moments of self-awareness, which ultimately led to an understanding of what I need in terms of self-care. For some, self-care is about a weekly massage, for others, it's yoga. And I've tried those things, among others, but they didn't really fill my cup, so to speak. I did them, thinking "any moment now, I'm going to feel whole and recuperated, but it never happened for me. It wasn't until I started focusing my interior design work and my business consulting on other introverted creatives that I realized that solitude was my form of self-care.

The moments of self-awareness that led to this revelation really had to do with me just paying attention to my inner voice. And to my body, which, at 40 has decided to completely betray me and function like a 60 year old's body. Rather than ignoring my inner voice and my aching back, I decided to pay attention. A wandering, unsettled mind meant I was unbalanced in some way - probably trying to do too many things, rather than focusing on a few really important things. If I felt unhappy, I began to notice that my body was also sending me signals - my back mostly, followed by my neck and shoulders. I'm sure I was holding stress in those areas and I'm sure that was due to the things I'd overcommitted to. I had a lot of moments where I just questioned the meaning of all of this. Like what is even the point. I had struggled to find meaning in my work beyond just pretty rooms, and I knew there had to be something deeper.

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Now, I'm not trying to paint a bad picture of what it's like to be 40, but you should know (if you don't already) that self-awareness does include pausing to notice these signals from ourselves to ourselves. So before you assume I'm going to just complain for the rest of the episode, let me reassure you - I'm not. This is actually where turning 40 got exciting for me. Being willing to be honest about things with myself meant I got to free myself from feeling unbalanced, directionless, and unproductive. It was really just a year of re-evaluating what was going to fuel me for the next half of my life, because it was clear to me that what I'd been attempting to do wasn't going to cut it.

Many of my interior design clients come to me in exactly the same head space. They've evaluated and determined that part of what isn't fueling them is their home. It's creating more headaches than it cures, and that's a problem. However, the next big moment of self-awareness for many of them is that they then feel guilty for wanting to improve their living space. For many years, I was working with clients who were in an internal tug-of-war, and often, the guilt won out. If I'm being honest, I think that was because I was focused on the wrong things. I love fabrics. I love gorgeous light fixtures. I love amazing cabinet hardware. Those are things that light up my reward center in my brain. I hadn't taken the time to dig deeper and determine what was the ultimate reward for them. In my 40th year, I did just that, and it has made all the difference in the world to me and my clients.

So it's safe to say that when design clients come my way, they've determined that their homes, as-is, aren't going to cut it. There needs to be a change, and although they come to me to help with aesthetics, my approach now is all about self-care. That's why I began speaking on the concept of the Quiet Room, and how every house should have one. (If you haven't listened to episodes ___ and ___ of the podcast, definitely go back and listen to them after you finish this one.) Y'all, this was such a groundbreaking idea that Real Simple magazine interviewed me and then called this the next big trend in interior design. There is something to the

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idea that we need to be designing spaces that are in direct correlation to our needs, and not just our wants. So what does that mean?

For many of us, we need time to just be. To decompress. To unwind. We design homes with a room for just about every activity under the sun - gaming, entertainment, exercise, cooking, sleeping, bathing, playing - except for solitude. Seems kind of strange, right, to design a room where we can just go be alone for a little bit, but part of changing the culture that rewards extroversion over introversion is changing the idea that we must always be doing something. My dad is kind of a prime example of someone who has a good balance in his life of doing and being. When it's time to do, he does it efficiently and at his best effort. When it's time to be, he has absolutely no guilt about sitting on the porch swing and spending an afternoon in a book. The porch is his place to simply be. I've noticed him many times in my life, just sitting outside, no book, nothing to occupy his mind, just quietly listening to the sounds of nature. Just saying that makes me want to breathe a sigh of relief. That feels like self-care...like contentment.

I've said before that our society is one of constant activity. The assumption is that if you're not working, you must be wasting time. Or if you're not keeping your kids entertained every second of everyday, you're a bad parent. Or if you're not volunteering at every function, you're a bad member of society. I think that needs to change.

Yes, I'm an introvert. I'm an interior designer. The marriage of those two parts of my life has resulted in identifying all of the ways our homes can be designed to accommodate the idea of just being. Paying attention to my own inner voice and body brought me to the concept of the Quiet Room. Today, I want to talk to you about the ways interior design can actually help you alleviate feelings of being unbalanced, unhappy, and unproductive - while also squashing this whole idea that we should feel guilty for wanting

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to spend money on our homes. Now, I'm obviously not advocating for anyone to go into debt - that's actually the opposite of what I'm saying. I'm talking about the idea of elevating our interiors, so that they rise up to meet us in our challenging times, as a form of self-care.

Downtime = balance. Let's start by establishing that we, as introverts, don't see downtime as unproductive. In fact, it's really important for us to have some downtime everyday. In her book, *The Secret Lives of Introverts*, Jenn Granneman polled introverts about how much downtime they got each day, and 13% said they got about 3 hours or less a week. That means they were getting just a few minutes each day to recover and process their day. Many of them said their schedule was just too hectic, while others said they felt guilty asking for alone time. Others said they didn't have a quiet space they could retreat to. So the first thing we have to do is change this conversation. We have to express to the people around us how important it is that we have alone time, plus a designated space to go find some quiet.

The interior design industry has put a big emphasis on the idea that homes must be grand or over-the-top in order to be magazine-worthy. There needs to be an "aspirational" element to the story in order for editors to want to distribute it to their readers. Aspirational homes look like expensive fabrics, one-of-a-kind antiques, a collection of original artwork that details the homeowner's worldly travels, a chef's-grade kitchen, natural stone flown halfway around the world. I'm not faulting them for choosing these homes, because I enjoy looking at them too, and it's what sells magazines. But what seems truly luxurious to me is not a house full of opportunities to drop names, it's a house that brings me comfort and peace, one that is where I find my highest form of self-care. So if you're an introvert like me, think about how you can design a home that offers opportunities for downtime in ways that coincide with your perfect form of self-care. But you have to get really clear on what that is in order to really maximize the design.

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Beautiful aesthetics and comfort = happiness. I asked a question on my Instagram account recently the effect our environments have on our well-being. Specifically, I asked if the idea of a roadside motel made my followers feel relaxed, and if the idea of using a gas station restroom made them feel comfortable. If there is any doubt at all about whether or not interiors can affect our well-being, you don't have to look any further than those two examples. Have you ever stayed in a gross motel? Y'all I stayed at the NYC West Side YMCA when I was on a trip with my design school in college. I felt like that was a real low point for me. Here we were, going to visit the highest profile architecture firms in the world, and then returning to what basically looked like the scene of a true crime documentary. The trip even started with us having to use communal showers. In the YMCA. In New York. On the West Side. We finally pitched a big enough fit that our chaperones were able to get us access to some private showers a few floors up - and you better believe that the change in environments did WONDERS to get us through the rest of that trip, even if we were sleeping in rooms the size of prison cells. (New paragraph) When I was in high school, my parents hired an interior designer to help them renovate our 1970s house. My dad was skeptical about the whole idea of hiring a designer - I'm sure he was going through that guilt thing where the internal conflict says that hiring an interior designer is pretentious and an unnecessary expense. He assumed she would come in and decorate the house with uncomfortable and fussy items that he had no attachment to, and besides, couldn't they just diy this thing themselves? It only took a short amount of time before he was 100% Team Interior Designer, and that was due to the fact that he began to see how this process was really one of fact-finding and hypothesis making (my dad is a scientist). The day she totally won him over was the day she told him color was a science and that things can be both beautiful and functional. Happiness is NOT a roadside motel, a gas station restroom, or the NYC West Side YMCA (no offense to any of the above). Those are places that meet the most basic of needs. Interior design gives us the opportunity to go beyond just the basic needs on Maslow's heirarchy and discover how our interiors can service the

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higher, more abstract needs we have as humans. Things like happiness. Things like contentment. Fulfillment. A home that is designed strictly from an aesthetics-only point of view may not check all of those boxes at the end of the day. What makes you feel comfortable? It doesn't matter if everyone you know has a certain sofa, if it hurts your back, it's not going to serve your need for comfort. It's more important for you to put aside the notion that there is only one "right" way to design or decorate and prioritize your needs first!

Quiet spaces = creative incubation. Have you ever been deep in thought when you have a total stroke of genius, or that thing you couldn't think of the other day pops into your head, or you finally figure out the solution to that problem you've been dealing with? This happens to me all the time. This is why I really hate brainstorming sessions because I never have anything to contribute during them! Like most introverts, I have my best ideas when I'm alone. I know many of you listening are running creative businesses of your own, so it's important that we consider that the creative process often involves a lot of time to think and process. Whether we're talking about your home or your office (and especially if your office is in your home), we need to make sure we have quiet spaces that will nurture what's known as "creative incubation" - the process I just described, where you might be thinking about one thing, but you get so deep into the folds of your mind that it actually brings about the answer to a completely different thing. Our creativity is dependent on our ability to achieve deep focus, so consider how important that is to you in the spaces you occupy. Certainly at work or in your office, but a space at home that encourages this activity is invaluable. (New paragraph) I typically research my podcast episodes and write them at home, where the distractions are minimal. I feel so energized when I'm researching for one episode, and it sparks ideas for other episodes. I couldn't do this if I were trying to work from a coffee shop or at my office where the distractions are too great. I love to sit at my kitchen table, where the natural light is amazing, and the environment is peaceful so I can delve into whatever topic I'm reading about. It's vital for creative

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introverts to design a space like this for ourselves! We have to promote creative incubation in our lives in order to feel like we're energized.

Tips to Promote Self-Care Through Interior Design:

Before you ever begin thinking the aesthetics of your home, consider how your space should make you feel. For me, it's things like rested, restored, recharged, peaceful, safe, comfortable, relaxed, content. Anything that doesn't directly bring me those feelings is out. A room dedicated to watching movies in surround sound? Nope. A completely open floor plan with contemporary finishes and furnishings that become an echo chamber? Hard pass. An outdoor kitchen? It's 800 degrees here 9 months out of the year, and that makes me miserable. What's important to YOU? Don't worry about the owner after you. Prioritize what YOU want to feel in your home. It's a little abstract, but you can do it with some patience and focused time on envisioning the new space. You can even do an exercise where you close your eyes and picture a perfect day in the new space. Who's there? What are they doing? What are you doing? What's the feeling in the air? Describe the day. Describe the vibe. Describe how you feel when you picture this scene. Write it all down. This is where you begin to create a design that actually fits your lifestyle.

When you finally start considering the aesthetics of the space, don't forget to include comfort and function as equally-ranking needs. A beautiful space can definitely bring momentary happiness, but a space that literally cradles your body and is designed around your physical needs is going to provide years of constant comfort for you. The last thing you want from a design that is supposed to promote self care is for it to end up invoking a feeling of dread. great news is that furniture companies are listening, and I'm not even ashamed to say we use recliners in our work all the time. You've

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probably even seen them in my portfolio, and you've never even known they were recliners. That's because the gap between beauty and comfort is constantly being bridged in new ways that can keep all members of a home happy! If you're an introvert, and downtime is the way you feel refreshed, then it's of the utmost importance for you to consider the ergonomics and comfort of the pieces you'll use to furnish your home. Designing just for things to be pretty is so 2019, and just like I predicted and Real Simple magazine emphasized - the next big trend in interior design is all about introverts. This is our moment!!

Remember that as creative introverts, we find our fuel in quiet reflection. Interior design can help you create the energy you need to give back to your world by offering you spaces that support this activity - and this activity only. While our families might not understand at first, we have to be willing to explain the creative power of solitude, which not only helps us perform at our highest levels in our jobs, but also helps us have the bandwidth to show up in our personal lives as well. You could tell them it's your own private think tank to help them understand the concept of having a Quiet Room. Deep focus can only be achieved without the presence of others - and this is true for extroverts, too - so don't overlook the importance of including a Quiet Room in your home's design. You can even compromise and have some parts of the house that feature more open areas for groups and gatherings, as long as you balance that with areas that offer places for quieter introspection.

When considering how you want to re-design your home, consider what is really your idea of self-care. Is it a wine room? A Pilates studio? A cozy nook under your staircase where you can read? A girl cave? A room on the total opposite side of the house from where your family hangs out that you can retreat to and process your day in total silence? There's no wrong answer - but we have to make a point to change the conversation about design by drawing attention to WHY we need these spaces. Life really did begin at 40 for me, because it was when I began to uncover the importance of interior design as a means of self-care. Everyone (and I do mean

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everyone) has an opinion about how we should be designing houses, and most of us never think to question what we really need from our spaces. We're told an open floor plan is what sells, so we buy it. We're told that a celebrity has a certain fabric, so we make it our mission to have that fabric. We see Pinterest and assume that the rooms we see there will solve our problems with our homes, without ever actually examining how we need our homes to nurture us. The link between interior design and self-care is that the best interiors are thoughtfully planned and intended to serve us in a way that provides for not only our most basic needs, but for the more actualized self's needs as well. Interiors that encourage downtime will offer balance in your life. Beautifully styled rooms that are also comfortable will promote contentment. Rooms that are designed around the need for solitude will bring about creative incubation. All of these are vital to an introvert's deepest and most profound needs, and we don't need to feel guilty for wanting to encourage self-care through the power of interior design.

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