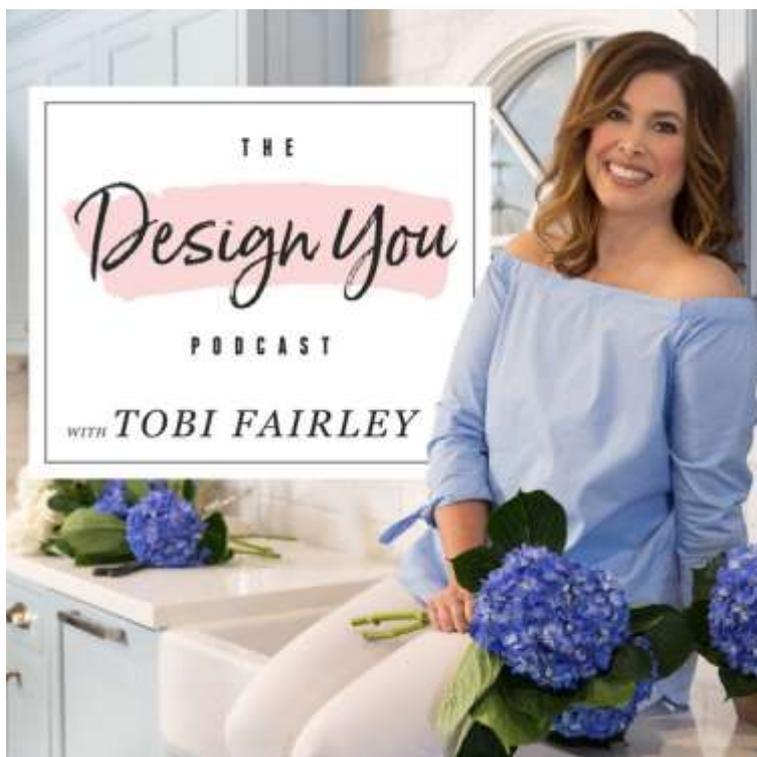


## Ep #80: Crushing Serial Entrepreneurship with Lauren Liess



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You are listening to *The Design You Podcast* with Tobi Fairley, episode number 80.

Welcome to *The Design You Podcast*, a show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth, and joy. Here is your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hello creatives and designers and business owners and all of you listening to the podcast today. I'm so happy you're here, and today I have a really fun interview for you with my friend Lauren Liess. So Lauren and I are really just getting to know each other in a deeper way. We've kind of always known each other a little bit and of each other, but you'll hear in the episode why we have a new connection with each other.

We're sort of in the same family now, as far as work goes, and so you'll hear all about that in the episode. But I really had the best time with this show and I think you're going to love hearing all about Lauren's creativity, how she's done books and TV shows and all the new exciting things she's getting into. And I hope it inspires you to dream a little bigger and reach a little farther in your own business, so enjoy my conversation with Lauren Liess.

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Tobi: Hey Lauren, welcome to *The Design You Podcast*.

Lauren: Thanks for having me.

Tobi: I'm so glad you're here. So we have known of each other for years. Not known each other super well but all of a sudden now we're in the same family because we're designing product for the same company, which we'll talk about in a little bit. But it's such a fun excuse for us to get together and have this conversation but also I just feel like a kindredness with you or something because of that.

Lauren: Totally. Totally. Totally.

Tobi: So fun. Okay, so for those people who maybe haven't heard of you, which I always say about all my guests, if they must be living under a rock if they're in the industry and they haven't heard of our fun guests. But we all have different styles and different kind of audiences, so for those people who don't know you, tell us a little bit about who you are and your business, and

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then we're going to dig into a ton of the nitty-gritty of all the different things you do. But tell us about that.

Lauren: Okay, so I'm a decorator and I'm based in Great Falls, Virginia. It's right outside Washington DC. My husband and I run our company together. I say I'm a decorator but we also have recently opened up a real estate brokerage and working on a family business where we are selling cutlery. So I kind of have I guess, decorator, real estate, and TVD.

We have five kids and we live on – I wouldn't say out in the country but people in DC probably consider us out in the country. So we have a property, big dogs, I'm really into gardening, I have a blog and I sort of like to share bits of our life and garden and projects I'm doing, interiors for clients.

Tobi: That's a lot. The one that always stops me in my tracks – I'm with you with all the business and all the stuff and I'm like, oh yeah, I can get that, me too, I have all these different things, and then you're like, and I have five kids. And I'm like, wait, what? I have one and she's a teenager and like, that's all. My husband and I were like, dude, one is enough. And so I love it but I can't fathom how there's enough time, energy, bandwidth, and all of that to do all this stuff and have five kids too.

Lauren: I think we're crazy probably. But yeah, life is crazy but it's good. It works. David's at home most days with the little ones. So our oldest three boys are in school then we've got two little girls at home. So he's at home most days with them. We have some childcare, which allows me to kind of be at work full time, so we're never balanced and it never fully is easy or makes sense, but we get it done somehow.

Tobi: Yeah, and the thing is nobody else is ever balanced either, but I have some illusion that with one kid I maybe could be more balanced than you, but the reality is none of us are ever balanced, right? So do you have an office, a design or decorating office outside of your home as well?

Lauren: I do, yeah. It's a little less than a mile from our house. So it's really convenient.

Tobi: And you have team members or what does that part of your business look like?

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Lauren: I have a project manager/designer and she and I work really closely together on every project, and then David is in for backend and he does like, the books and all the fun paperwork and that side of things.

Tobi: Awesome. So let's talk a little bit about how you built your business because it was really fun to watch and I was doing the same thing at the same time essentially because my business is 20 years old but I started blogging about 11 or 12 years ago. I can't remember. I don't know, it was about '08 probably. So around the time that you probably did as well, and that's how I first heard of you is I felt like we were out there in the blogosphere together. Didn't you feel like that too?

Lauren: Totally. Tobi, I think that's right when I started. I think it was '08 and it was like, 11 years ago. I had just started. And I remember your blog and you shared so much good juicy business tips. I loved it. And I almost joke it was like a graduating class. Like when people started blogging. We were in the same class I think.

Tobi: Yes we were, and it was one of the early classes when there was still room and you could still make a difference and kind of get seen a little. Not that blogging doesn't make a difference now, but you could still have a little bit more of a voice than we sometimes feel like we have now, right?

So talk through that a little bit because you really did create a large following, and that really built your brand to what it is today in a lot of ways and it did for me too. So speak to that a little bit, that whole blogging thing and maybe even kind of how it's changed now because you still blog but it's different, right?

Lauren: It's different. Definitely heavier on the Instagram, but yeah, I think I had started my business, just gotten it going, and my early intentions were just to have a part-time job and part-time design business. And at the time – this is like, it was '08, when the market was crashing. So my husband and I had bought our first town home and we just started watching the price drop, drop, drop, and we sold it while we still could. Lost a ton of money, and had to move in to my parents basement.

Super lucky that we had it, but we had a one-year-old at the time and I felt like a complete failure. It was really hard. It was tough, and at the same time I was trying to kind of launch this side business, and he was a teacher at the

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time. And I guess I was online and I discovered – I don't even remember which blog it was, but I discovered this thing called blogs and blogging.

And after kind of reading for a month or two, I was like, I think I want to start one. So started blogging from the basement and I read some article where it was like, if you write 30 posts, that's when you'll start developing a following. And I'm like, okay, I think this can help my business. So I had this goal to write 30 posts and started kind of doing it a few times a week.

And what was really cool about it, I think it was right on my 30<sup>th</sup> post, Washington Post picked up one of my blog posts and did an article on it, and then I got a total influx of readers. And with that, I'd been sharing client work on there and so then I got more clients from it. And eventually, Shelter magazine's publication started reaching out as I would eventually save up money and were able to buy another house.

And I would show kind of what we were doing there and show client work, and then they started reaching out asking if they could feature those projects in the magazines. And so the publications led to more – the press led to more clients, and it just really – that blogging is really what I can attribute our business to. It was – and as you know, it's a full-time job in and of itself. It's crazy when you're doing it hardcore. Back in those days, I don't know, I probably spent 20 to 30 hours a week on it and it was in the middle of the night. It was crazy to get it going.

Tobi: Me too. I mean, I remember those days and I had my daughter, who's now 14 so she was like, two or three at the time and I was doing the same thing. Literally, I would work all day at this design business and I had a retail store back at the time, which shoot me, I don't know how I did all of that, but thankfully I don't anymore. But I mean, like you, we would work all day and then I would get home and I would feed her and I would get something to eat and I was literally back on the bed or in a chair with my laptop and working like you for four, five, six, eight more hours until one in the morning or two in the morning or something crazy, and it was literally like two full-time jobs.

So when you're describing that, I'm like, I can feel exactly what that felt like because same thing. And it was hard. It was awesome and hard at the same time, and I think we did have an opportunity. Just our timing was right because now, magazines are so different. There are so many more blogs, but I remember at the time, and I'm sure you remember this too, that magazines

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were kind of freaking out a little bit about what are these blog things and are they going to put us out of business.

And so that's why they were paying so much attention to us and it worked in our favor because they then started saying – I have the same thing like, before Southern Accents magazine went out of business, I remember them reaching out to me and saying we saw you said something about you're having a party at your house. Could we come cover it?

Literally, in real time they were watching what we were saying, which was fascinating and weird and scary and exciting and exhilarating at the same time, and I know you were having those same things happening.

Lauren: And I think at the time we can look back now in hindsight and understand what was happening, but at the time I didn't fully understand that. I don't think I understood that – I remember I would show a picture of some designer's work and say oh, I love this project, and then you'd get an email from that designer thanking you.

And it was like, at the time when we were just starting blogging, you're thinking, no one's reading this. I'm just kind of writing to my grandmother and her friends. And then you're like oh wow, people are actually reading it and feeling a connection and it's bigger than you think.

Tobi: It's so big. And it's funny also in hindsight, 10 years later that that version of it was really so short-lived in the grand scheme of things, which shows us how fast technology moves these days. And I mean, the life cycle is even so much shorter for anything these days than it was back then, but that's kind of fascinating too because I think before that we were used to doing something and then we'd do the same thing for like, 40 years.

And not only were we just kind of getting our feet on the ground when it started changing and like, was on to the next thing, it was kind of – I don't know, like a little flash and then that part was over. Don't you think?

Lauren: Completely. It is crazy.

Tobi: So weird. So well, so that led to a lot of other things for you, including one of the first things that you then did or maybe not one of the first but one of kind of the first big things you did from there was you wrote a book, right? So

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tell us about that because you've told me a little bit previously about how you had a book agent and I think people – I love to tell people how stuff happens. Even if it's changed a little bit of how it works today, I think it's just so helpful for people listening to see oh, that's how that happened or how these people came together or how she made this dream come to fruition. So tell us what that process looked like of having a book.

Lauren: So I do have an agent and she reached out to me probably – I think this was maybe two years into blogging, about writing a book. And I was super excited about it and kind of sat down and she said why don't you kind of write a proposal about what your book would be about. And I kind of sat down and started thinking about it, and I realized I just wasn't at the point in my career where I was ready to put my work out there and show it in a book.

It wasn't good enough yet. I didn't have the projects that I could be proud enough of to put in there, and I knew that whatever I put out that first time would sort of stick with me and people would remember it. And so I didn't want to put out that version yet. I just wasn't there yet. I was too new.

So I think about five years later, I reached out to her. Four, five years later, and she and I had kept in touch and I reached back out to her and I said okay, I think I'm ready now for the book. So she had me write her a proposal for the concepts. I wrote the concept, and that first one was called Habitat and it was kind of like a field guide to decorating. Just sort of a nuts and bolts, how to decorate the house.

And so she from there, took the proposal and she reached out to different publishing houses. And more than one of them were interested, so she set up an auction, and then they bid on it. And then I went with Abrams. And I did my first book with them and I'm also doing my second book with them.

Tobi: That's so cool. And you even were sharing with me that like, when you go this route, it's not kind of like, just getting one book and checking that off your bucket list and moving on. This was actually part of the plan that you would have multiple books, a series of books, right?

Lauren: Yeah, so well, I should back that up. So I haven't signed on to do multiple books with them but when you sign the first agreement, it's kind of weird. Like in publishing and with your agent, everyone kind of just assumes you're going to do more. It's sort of this thing like, you're valuable to the

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publishing house because it's not just one book. You're going to become what they call a house author. So I think I'm considered a house author at Abrams.

So we sign on to do one, but that in that contract, your next book you share with them first, and so they get the first look at it. And if they want it then they'll make you an offer and you can accept it or go elsewhere with it. So yeah, it's great and it's great for me. I love Abrams and I love my editor, so it's great when you can work with the same people and you get a shorthand and you get to know them really well and you know what kind of product you're putting out.

Tobi: Right. So when you have that relationship with an agent, so is it in any way like working with other PR or publicists? Or do they get paid if they get you a book deal or is it – do they do other things for you? Is it literally just the securing this relationship?

Lauren: So some do more things, but the way my agent and I work together is she gets a percentage of the book deals. And so she's also a talent agent, so when we did our TV show, then she also gets a percentage of the show as well, of that. But she's not like a PR manager in any role. I don't have a PR person, so I just kind of again, look to Instagram and my blog for that.

So she's just strictly for securing those deals, but she's amazing and we brainstorm all the time and she comes up with ideas. It's just like having this awesome partner kind of pushing you forward and making you go places you wouldn't necessarily go.

Tobi: Yeah, I love that. So let's talk about the TV show because that's one of the other things that I haven't really had anybody on the podcast yet that has had a TV show on a major network and you have one. Are you wrapping up the first? Is it already all aired or are you still in the middle of the first season?

Lauren: The first season just aired and I think that I don't even know what the rerun schedule is but every now and then I get emails from people, I just saw your show, so I think it's still on HGTV. But we just wrapped up filming about a year ago. So yeah, so it was a crazy experience. It was one of those couple shows. My husband and I did it together and then there are bits of the kids in it. We did eight episodes and a house per episode, and I think we had 11 weeks to do renovations on all eight of them. It was crazy. It was nuts.

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Tobi: So are those your projects or it's something that the TV show sets up for you to work on?

Lauren: They set it up. So they are our projects that we're managing, but they're not our typical clients. So they actually cast for the clients. So they're looking for renovations that can be completed in that short of a time period, and then also renovations and projects that they believe would appeal to their audience.

Tobi: That's so cool. So is that process – I mean, you had an agent that helped you get that deal also, you said, but what about this? Is this just kind of like an anomaly and very few people are going to get it? Is that something that other people could actually make happen in their career? What do you think about the whole TV show thing? And did it do and does it do for your career what we have always thought TV did for our career or our business?

Lauren: That is so interesting. Okay, I'll start with the first part, getting it. I do think it's one of those things for – it's like you never know. Right place, right time, right person, right connection. It could potentially work for anyone but it is very, very, very difficult. With the blog, again, this was a whole blog thing, our TV show story isn't like super cute or sweet. It's not like oh, we just – I'll tell you how it really went.

Tobi: It was just a business deal. We just made it happen.

Lauren: It was one of those situations where with the blog, I'd been getting every month or couple months or randomly, I would get emails from production companies saying do you want to do a TV show? And I just didn't have any interest. It was just more of a privacy thing. I felt like the blog was already so much in our lives that I just wanted to kind of live life.

But then my first book came out and at the same time, it came out I think at the same time as Ellen and other people's books who had been on TV. And it was doing really well on Amazon, and then when those other books came on that people had shows with, it crushed my book.

Tobi: You're like, I got to have a show.

Lauren: I was like, it was number one and then these came along. And so I thought you know what, at that time, my book agent, she had just moved out

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to LA from New York and I was like, you know what, and I talked to a couple friends in the industry who had design shows at the time. And they were like, you should just do it because you're already putting all that work out there into your fabric line, in your business, in your books, and it's just that much more lucrative if you actually have a larger platform, a bigger following.

And so I thought you know what, who knows? We'll give it a shot. Because I normally just – they might not even write back. So the next time I get one of those emails, I will just put them in touch with you and we'll see what happens. And then the next week we got an email from our production company, Collins Avenue. We got an email from them and I put them in touch with her and they set up a Skype call.

And then I was out in LA working on a design project and met them all and then they came and they filmed what's called a sizzle reel. It's like a three-minute, little – almost like a preview. And they pitched that to HGTV and then HGTV loved it and then they ordered a pilot show. So you basically just film one episode, and I think I was six months pregnant at the time of this one. Good timing.

So we filmed the pilot and then it aired, and then found out a few months later that they were picking up and ordering a whole season. And so it's so funny because it's like, this is in your life but it's just on this weird back burner because by the time we did the sizzle, it's like, oh, six months later then you do a pilot. And then it wasn't another year. It took a whole year before we began filming again.

So it's like this weird thing that you just kind of like, forget about at times but it's kind of always there, but you forget about it because it's – there's so much time while all these execs are making decisions and the network is changing and being bought out and it's crazy. Yeah, that's how that worked.

Tobi: So what does it do for your career? Do you think it does today for your career what it would have done 10 years ago? Is it different? Was it amazing? Were there pros and cons? What did that part look like?

Lauren: So you know, I don't quite, I guess, know what it would do for my career yet because it's just happening. But I think that the experience was really cool. Just seeing how a story unfolds and how they create an episode and how there's a story arc. Like my husband – I was an English minor, he

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was an English major, and we both really loved kind of that process and that kind of storytelling aspect to it.

I think it was different for us in that I was used to and we were used to only putting out things that we're fully in control of. And when you're partnering with other people to do a show, it's like the final control is up to them. And so we were happy with how it turned out and it was great, but it's just really different when you're kind of a business owner control freak.

Tobi: So do you have the feeling of things that we hear from like, reality TV or The Bachelor or whatever, that when you see it you're like – my husband and I joke all the time because we'll watch those shows and then he'll be like, oh, that part's not real. The producers totally made them do that thing or whatever. So did you feel like it was natural or is it a combination of scripted and natural? Or is it super scripted? And not that I care either way. It's entertaining, but what's that mix look like?

Lauren: It's like a combination. I think you kind of go through and you do everything naturally the first time, but because there's only so many cameras, you have to do it again and you have to have your conversations again. And so then you kind of have to remember what it was you said. But I would say I was very thankful for them because I'm sure I said a ton of ridiculous things that thankfully were edited out. So it was probably good.

Tobi: So instead of making you look stupid or mean or horrible, they made you look really good.

Lauren: Yeah, it was great. They're a great network to work with for sure.

Tobi: That's really fun. Okay, so you have the books, you have the TV show that you've done, and now you're really – you've had your fabric line that you self-produced, I think you told me for like, seven years or so. But you're really moving now over into the world of licensing, and that's how we started this whole conversation. Because we both now have product – yours will come out in a month or so from the time we're recording this with Woodbridge Furniture, but you have some other things launching. So let's talk about licensing a little bit.

Lauren: Yeah, I mean I was probably going to say you had these thoughts as well that as a designer, there's only so many hours in the day and we get paid

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for our hours. We get paid for our time. Whether it's a flat fee or however we're doing it, there's only so much – I realized there was only so much work I could put out there in having a design business.

And so started going to well, let's try to bring in mailbox money. Let's try to bring in money in other ways. And so of course product is super exciting and I'm passionate about everything that goes into the house. So really try to make an effort to just kind of diversify a bit and so we're launching the collection with Woodbridge with you, and then Taylor King, we're doing upholstery with, and then I'm doing a tile line with Architectural Ceramics right now.

Doing a plumbing and sink collection with a company called Atmosphere. I think I maybe told you about the knife company my dad and I are starting. We come from a long line of knife sharpeners and so I've been for years been dying to get my dad to – he used to make knives and he stopped doing it for years. I've been trying to get him to go back and do it.

So we're launching that business called Generations Cutlery and it's sort of based on the home and the kitchen and family, and kind of like, old world knives and cooking and kind of slower living. So it's like as I've gone into interior design, I think I was telling you earlier, as I've gotten to design, I think I landed at interior design because it was one of the first things I did when I graduated from college.

I was decorating my first place and I was like, this is so much fun. I want to start a business around it. And so I did and I kind of stopped there, but as I've gotten older and had more kids and get more into different parts of my life where I'm cooking and enjoying gardening and music and different aspects of life, I start, in my mind, forming little businesses around them. And I just enjoy it and I always say I am a designer but I think of myself as a business woman first and that's just – there's these next progressions where it just goes hand in hand with that.

Tobi: Yeah, and we were definitely talking about that offline before we started because I'm the very same way and I think of myself as – and you, as a serial entrepreneur. And I think that that is something I really want to point out in this episode because I have a lot of creatives on the show. I have some other people coming on the show soon that are going to be teaching us about all kinds of other things and like, the online business world and other fun things,

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but it's so fun when I have creatives like you that are so similar to me on the show because I relate so much.

But I think the common thread that I really want to point out here is that the people that are doing so well in the design industry are really not just thinking of themselves as designers. It is this whole idea of being more of a businessperson, an entrepreneur first, and that's exactly how I think of myself, that design is my vehicle in a lot of ways, and I don't even think of it necessarily as my main vehicle.

It's like, equal to other things I do, but I think that's so important because when I coach creatives, so many people have a hard time releasing just the idea of interior designer. And it doesn't matter what industry you're in, it could be anything. It can be event planner or whatever, and then you look at somebody like Rachel Hollis, who is an event planner, and now she's basically like, Oprah.

And I think that the difference is that she thinks like we're talking about thinking and she's not just seeing herself in one role or one piece of value to offer or one type of skill that she has, but literally seeing possibilities and opportunities everywhere and that sounds like what you're talking about. Because you told me you were really itching to make this a full-blown lifestyle thing and I hear that often with other peers that I have on the show. Not that often.

I mean, we're in the minority of people that are building these kind of bigger businesses, but I think that that kind of mindset is what gets us to the type of businesses that a lot of people wish they had because you're saying I'm itching for a full out lifestyle. I want to do food and knives and home products and maybe things that have nothing to do with the home, and you could do anything with your kids. Jason and John Madcap just told me on a recent episode they're writing a children's book. And literally...

Lauren: Me too. I am too.

Tobi: So fun. So speak to that a little bit of how we can help people start to understand what kind of mindset it does take and what kind of thinking it does take and even skills, business skills or whatever those things are that kind of take you out of being just the artisan or the practitioner, and really put you into that more entrepreneur realm and thinking and mindset.

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Lauren: You know, I think it's one of those things. I often think about when I was a little kid, and when we're little kids, we're just kind of interested in everything. We think we can do anything at that point. If we're like, I'm going to go draw, and we do so much and we dabble in so much and we kind of have time to get creative.

And then as we grow up, we don't really have the time because we only have so many hours in a day and we have to bring money in for those hours spent. So I think it is kind of a challenge to pause a bit and take a step back and think what else do I really want to do? What do I want to try? What is exciting to me?

I think when I'm really excited and passionate about something, it kind of naturally pulls my attention away from the focus of my business in a way and it always is during that extra time. So it's like you're working your job during the day but then it's that extra time at night or I wake up really early in the morning and that's like, when you think and that's when you sort of – in my mind, that's when I kind of develop these secondary business ideas.

And kind of go from there, but I think it is – I'm trying to think how it's happened but I think it must have been somehow carving out those bits of time for myself where I did just let my mind wander. And there are so many businesses that I don't do. I'm sure you too. There are so many crazy ideas that I'm like, as I think them through I'm like, nope, this isn't going to work.

Tobi: But just the fact that you're always thinking and you're always considering opportunities, and you have the confidence to explore them. So many people get so attached to a specific idea or a product, and then if it doesn't show up in exactly the way they saw it in their mind, then it's a failure or they want to quit or they feel fear of rejection and all of that stuff.

And I think it's just what I see that you're describing and it's true for me and others that are doing this, I think it's just that willingness to dream and to explore the possibilities and to not be so married to any given part or piece of a business. Would you agree with that?

Lauren: Totally. And I think it's also like, you get to a certain point or age or whatever it is that you're just like, you don't really care what people think about you anymore. Where you're like, I'm sure my family used to think oh my gosh, you're crazy, what are you doing? You're starting all these businesses. I

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don't even care anymore. I'm like yes, we're crazy, yes, we're moving for the sixth time. Yes, we're doing another house.

You do get to that point where you're just like, there's amazing women who are 85 years old and they do not care. That's like what I want to try to have now because it just allows you to just be free and do what you really want and need to do.

Tobi: I agree with you. And I see so many people – I just was having a conversation with someone yesterday that I coached that think caring so much about what people think about them and oh, I don't want to be one of those people who – who's annoying or who's sales-y or who's a flake, or like you said, who's all over the place or whatever. And I'm like, but why? Why do you care about that? And so I think that's so wise of you to say you know what, I get to decide and if y'all don't like it then that's okay.

Lauren: Yeah. And I think you probably know from blogging. I mean, it helped me develop a thick skin. I mean, in those early days of blogging, there are people out there. You could say something is pink and somebody's going to get mad at you because they think it's blue. Truly, when you put yourself and your work out there, you're putting it out there for criticism and I think it's a good thing because I was probably so much more sensitive 10 years ago than I am now.

Now I'm like I don't care, it's not for everybody, that's okay. It really does make you tougher and I think to really have freedom, you just cannot care what others think about you and what you're doing. It has to feel right for you.

Tobi: So how much design work do you do still? Like, how many projects do you do? Does it ebb and flow? Because I do way less than I used to. I used to do, I don't know, gosh, 10 or 15 in different sizes a year. Maybe occasionally something more and now I'm so happy if I do like, two to five projects a year and do all the other stuff that I enjoy doing. So has that changed for you? Do you still do a ton of those? What does that part look like?

Lauren: So I'm kind of trying to get where you are. I'm still at that – my goal is all these lines are new and everything is new. Nothing has really changed for me yet. I'm still at that point where your nose is to the grindstone and you're like, designing everything away but nothing's been released yet and nothing is making money.

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So I'm still – we're at the point where we're still full speed ahead. Interior design full time. But my goal is to take it back to maybe having two to four special projects going on. And I say that. I love all my clients, it's just like, we talked about, I need to stretch creatively and do some other things too. So my goal is to get where you're at and just have a few great projects going on.

I really love writing. I definitely have a few more book ideas that I want to get out there and a children's book is one of them. I've had this kid's book in my head for years right now and I'm trying to work with an artist to make that happen. And then we have our real estate brokerage, which is taking some time and we're doing flips with that.

And that's really cool because you don't have an actual client when you're doing the flip. I mean, the budget is king but it's fun because you kind of just get to do exactly what you want while still stretching creatively.

Tobi: And I love what you're saying because I'm always in personal development and I've just been working on this again with myself and going okay, even though everybody else in the world may think that I'm playing full out, I'm looking at myself going you know what, you're playing small in a few areas. You could go bigger in an area and you want to, and so I've been digging into this again and kind of going – exactly like you, like what do I want to do? What's fun? Where should we stretch more?

And I love hearing you say all the things you're doing not because I want you to be exhausted because you even said you're working on a little bit of slower living and this knife collection is around that. But I always want people to see how much it actually takes to create businesses and money and wealth and all the things you're striving for because it is a full on all the time for so many of us.

And I think people, they see the fame or the success that other people like you have, or things that I've done, or things that some other designer or another industry has done, but they just can't fathom how much work you're actually doing. And I've said this before about other people, but as you're talking, I'm just understanding the magnitude of you've got five kids, you've got a full-time design business, you're doing products, you did a TV show, you did a book, and now you have a real estate company, you're flipping and developing houses, and you've got this other thing with your dad.

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And not that you don't have other partners and people working. You do. You have to have a team and people and you couldn't do it all by yourself, but I just want to point out, as I like to do for a lot of these episodes of that is a lot of stuff. And clearly you're high energy and your husband must be too, but do you understand – do you know how much stuff you're doing and is it – what about that?

Lauren: We do, and I will tell you honestly, through that process with TV, as we were kind of getting things going, I probably went through some of the hardest time – family was healthy, that's all great, but probably went through some of the toughest times I've ever had as an adult. Just try to get through.

I think when we first started pre-production for the show, some things, it's hard because when you're working to do a show with a company, they don't exactly know how you run your business and you know how you have to run your business, but you don't have full control over exactly how it is you run your business.

So I went through a point where I mean, I probably got to hold my four-month-old baby for like – it was like, 15 or 20 minutes a day at one point. I was sitting with the family eating for 15 minutes, and then going back to work and working really late at night, waking up really early in the morning to try to pump all these designs out at once. And it just wasn't a healthy situation and I got really sick and I mean, even filming, I lost my voice a couple of times in it.

But it's totally not easy and it's honestly not something I would recommend. There have been points where I know that we are stretching ourselves too thin for sure, and you're dropping balls. And it's just really, really hard. I think the funny thing is what spurred us to do the show was making the things like the book or products more profitable, and in the end hoping that I could work a little less and take on a little bit less client work.

But whenever you're gearing up to do that, you know you have to pour even more in to get to that point. So we've been at that point, that building, building, building phase for probably three or four years now where we look at each other, my husband and I, and we just say we are fully aware that this is not a sustainable pace that we could maintain for long in our lives.

We know it has to be temporary. We cannot continue this. And we're kind of hitting the downhill now that these products are finally coming out and all of

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this side work that I've been doing at nights and on weekends, it's finally done and it's just going to – we can move on. But it has been a big challenge and that is something that I had – during that time, I really did have to slow down like crazy on my blog.

It would be months between posts, and I didn't really have the heart to tell myself I was stopping blogging, but I really was stopping blogging at points just to kind of get through it. But once we stopped filming and we kind of caught our breath for a little bit, I did start blogging again. And the reason I like it so much is because the writing process helps me kind of gain clarity in my head.

And writing down about what we've been doing and all of that, it does – it forces you to internalize what's been going on, what you want to change, and through that, I kind of discovered, you know what, what's really important to me is life and is quality of life and it is what we were going for the whole time, but it kind of got lost for a bit because to actually make these deadlines, we couldn't have any quality of life to speak of.

And so it's been the thing we've been working on for probably the past year just as a family is really trying to get that awesome quality of life and kind of building that into our schedule like it's a job. And with blogging, what I like about it is I'll share those kind of special moments, whether it's getting vegetables from the garden or making a pretty meal, or going to Mount Vernon.

I'll tell myself I can do this and I can justify this because it's work because I'm going to blog about it. So it's kind of forced and I love it. It's just kind of like this forced awesome family time that I kind of need. It sounds crazy that I need to schedule my family time but I do in order to get it in. So we've been working really hard on that.

Tobi: I absolutely schedule my family time and I teach all the people I work with. I'm like, if you want to have any balance, if you want to ever work out, if you want to spend time with your kids, it better be a block on that calendar, otherwise it's not going to happen if you're trying to build a business.

And I can relate so much to the – like you're saying, the seasons of hustle and then the seasons of rest and I think there's sacrifice and there's a lot of stuff, and hopefully at the end of it you look back and most of it, if not all of it

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was worth it. And I think it is usually for most people, but I think I love that you're so transparent about that because that's one of the other things that I want people to see is when you sign up for this kind of life, this kind of business, this kind of brand, this kind of money, it's not without sacrifice.

It's not without these periods that don't look exactly like you would want them to, but it's part of the process. And I think for me, the best part through all of those was always what I learned. Because you don't learn anything when life is really, right? It's in the hardest moments that you grow so much.

And really you kind of go, okay, well now I know what I don't want. I don't want to travel every week for three days and never see my kids and I know I don't want to not feel like I ever get to cook in my kitchen again. And so I think to me, it's beautiful even though it's hard because it's part of that growth process and part of the – just kind of those cycles of life. So I can so relate to all of that. I love it. Thank you for being so transparent about that.

Because that's the part – you know, it's so easy to just see the highlight reel when we say that all the time on blogs or Instagram or on the TV show. And nobody is really saying but yeah, I went 45 days with seeing my kids 15 minutes a day or something like that, and that's the truth behind it, right?

Lauren: Yeah. And I struggle with that. For me, Instagram or my blog, it is my little happy place in a way where I'll go back and it's like, the things that I really want to remember. It's almost like a scrapbook for me. But you want to be real on there too and every now and then I'll say something like that, like it is hard or whatever it is, and I always hesitate.

I'm like, gosh, is this going to sound like complaining? Because I am so thankful for it. I wouldn't change it, but I also don't want to act like all is perfect and easy. It's like there's a funny line of being honest and sounding like you're complaining, and you don't – it's just a weird line. Different people are going to think you're being complaining and others are going to thank you for your honesty. So it's hard.

Tobi: In the same way, I kind of teeter on that because I'm thinking I'm not a negative type person – of course we all complain, but everybody's got their own problems. They don't want to just hear mine. But at the same time I think it's so helpful and refreshing to hear parts of the real story behind things

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because otherwise, I think people feel so inadequate themselves because they know the hard parts there too.

And they're like, well, I must be doing it wrong because it looks like she only has the happy parts. I have all the parts. What's wrong with me? And so I just think it's so enlightening, refreshing, helpful to people to say oh, okay, hers sounds exactly like my process. No wonder I thought it was hard. It is hard.

So yeah, I agree with you though. There is that line between – one of the things I love about Instagram stories is that because they go away unless you save them as a highlight. But you can be, I feel like, more real and more behind the scenes in some of those. Have you used that in that way?

Lauren: Totally. Yes. Oh yes. I think I've filmed moments where I'm just like, staring at the camera with like, a glass of beer as my child is screaming in the background. And just showing the funny parts of this is life. We know one day it's going to be funny. It's not funny to you at the moment, but it's probably funny to somebody else because it's not them at the time but they can relate.

Tobi: Well, thank you so much for being here. This was so fun. I knew it would be. Anything else that anybody needs to know? Just go after their dreams or what do you want to leave people with?

Lauren: You know, I think would – something that I'm realizing now and that we are trying to work on is like, it is this whole thing, whatever it is you're doing, where you're trying to get, it really is about enjoying the process and the journey and being thankful for not actually being at point B yet. I just think if you're going after these goals and you're trying to achieve this and that in your business, it's like it's easy to sort of wish the moment away and not appreciate it.

So I feel like if you could just be in the present moment and enjoy it, you're just going to be a lot happier. And I have to remind myself of that every day and I forget a lot of days.

Tobi: I love that. Such good advice. Because if not, the sad part is a lot of times when you do get to the actual result or outcome or goal, it's not that fulfilling anyway, right? And not what you thought it would be at least, and so I agree with you. I think if you can't have fun while you're doing it, then kind of what's the point? Because it's not like you arrive at this magical place and

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then you're like oh, that was so worth all of it. You're like, no, not exactly. So such good advice.

Well, thank you so much. I know people will love this episode and I can't wait to see you really soon at market and see all your beautiful products and congratulations. So I'll see you really soon.

Lauren: Thank you. Okay, thanks so much Tobi.

Tobi: Bye.

Lauren: Bye.

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Okay, wasn't that so much fun? And just inspiring? I mean seriously friends, she has five children and she does all of that stuff. I seriously need a kick in the butt when it comes to how much I get done and yeah, I do a lot, but gosh, she has five kids. So no more complaining for Tobi. If she can do it, I can do it, right?

Not the five kid thing, but all the business stuff for sure. So I hope you're inspired. I hope you dream bigger. I hope you go after what you want. And thank you so much for being here. And if you want to continue this conversation with me and hopefully with Lauren, we're going to try to have her soon in one of our Facebook Lives over in *The Design You Podcast* community, so hop over to Facebook and join us at [facebook.com/groups/designyoupodcastcommunity](https://facebook.com/groups/designyoupodcastcommunity) because we're often bringing guests that we have on the show over there for live Q&As.

So look for Lauren over there soon, and in the meantime, just have a conversation with me because I want to hear your thoughts on the podcast and anything that we talk about that has to do with small business, creative business, being a designer, anything that you want to talk about. So let's get to talking over in the podcast Facebook community and I'll see you here again next week with another great episode. Talk to you then.

Thank you so much for joining me for this episode of *The Design You Podcast*. And if you'd like even more support for designing a business and a life that you love, then check out my exclusive monthly coaching program Design You at [tobifairley.com](https://tobifairley.com).