
Perfectly Imperfect Style

With a real knack for seeing how castoff stuff can become cool décor, Ki Nassauer became the OG of upcycling. In her new book, she invites us into the homes of fellow creatives and collectors to show how style with a backstory feels as beautiful as it looks.

Story by
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→ “Everything you put into your home should reflect you,” says Ki Nassauer. “Every object. You know, it’s not a hotel room.”

That just might be the bottom line for this author, magazine editor, style expert, junk entrepreneur, pro merchandiser...well, we could go on. (But did we mention she’s an upcycling genius?) Suffice it to say, Ki is as individual as the decorating approach she favors. In her just-released book, *Lived-In Style—The Art of Creating a Feel-Good Home*, she introduces us to fellow creatives and individualists as we tour room after intriguing room.

These are spaces that ooze perfectly imperfect personal style.

For many of us, creating interiors that truly reflect who we are is a tough go. It’s far easier to buy a canned suite of new pieces or call a decorator. So, Ki breaks down the process of pulling it all together with tips on shopping vintage, creating artful displays, mixing styles, and even knowing when (and how) to quit—lest the look leans more hoarder than haute. She guides us through the eclectic rooms she’s gathered on the pages, telling the homeowners’ stories while peeling back their homes’ layers to instruct and inspire. As evidenced by

the sampling of images here, these are rooms worth spending time in.

The good news is, to create a lived-in home, the first step is to simply relax—and your rooms will come along with you. “I wanted to show people how to be more themselves in order to create a lived-in feel in their homes,” Ki says. “The idea is that it feel comfortable and casual—like putting on your favorite pair of jeans. Anyone can design a home that embraces.”

The beauty of Ki’s approach is that it doesn’t have to be perfect, and it doesn’t have to be pricy either. According to Ki, the look is “about finding joy

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in the imperfections that give our lives, and our homes, their unmistakable character. It's mismatched and worn, used and repurposed, kind and respectful to the earth and its resources." The homeowners she chose to illustrate her point have gathered pieces they love

over time and woven them together to create rooms that are truly their own. Most of us had plenty of time to ponder our own spaces as we hunkered at home during the pandemic lockdowns—surrounded by our things while separated from our people. "The



pandemic brought us back into our homes and prompted us to think about what has meaning," Ki says. "The importance of home resonated—we began to view it as a haven, one that makes us feel comforted and protected."

Some of us reacted by ordering buckets of paint and developing an eBay problem. After all, plain white walls suddenly seem boring when you've been staring at them long enough. As a result, the trend winds currently favor a maximalist approach—and a nostalgia for more carefree times.

Still, Ki cautions that too much can go too far. "The minimalist trend brought us is the idea of curation," she says. "People were facing these blank spaces, and they wanted to build up some layers, but in a more thoughtful way. I think we'll find an in-between, which has a little more design going on. So, you might have a kind of a maximalist wall display or corner or library. What makes the look best is when it is balanced by visual relief. People need breathing space—some white around the edges."

To be your own best curator, start by identifying elements that have meaning to you, comfort you, make you happy, and serve a purpose. Happily for the decorating budget, these things can be found in grandma's attic or the



Why it works: This display is well curated to include only oil paintings of ships on water. A lot of collectors hone their displays to focus and limit their purchases. The result is a united and beautiful arrangement.

local flea market. "I think one of the advantages of collecting is that you acquire provenance," Ki says. "You are buying or living with something that's inherently beautiful or useful. After all, if it's lasted this long and people still love it, then it's got integrity."

Vintage objects have been Ki's stock in trade for more than 20 years now, when she went from a fashion retailer with her own Minneapolis shop to a collector and junker who parlayed her good eye and merchandising skills into founding Junk Bonanza, an antiques and vintage show that regularly drew thousands of fans and shoppers. Along the way she turned bed coils into candleholders, chicken feeders into spice racks, and vintage suitcases into wall shelves—among countless other how-did-she-think-of-that ideas. She has since sold the Junk Bonanza, but you can find Ki and her ideas (and her online magazine, *Lived-In Style*) at kinassauer.com and [@livedinstylemag](https://www.instagram.com/livedinstylemag).

Ki is, of course, a collector herself—though a discerning one. And like the homes in her book, she finds beauty beyond strict decorating categories. "I love all styles," Ki says. "I don't necessarily gravitate towards modern, country, or traditional. I wanted to show that you could create that feeling



in all genres. You could do that for no money or a lot of money, in a small space, big space, in the country, in the city. That was my goal. It's more of a way of living versus a specific style."



Why it works: These pieces have much in common for visual cohesion—they are all examples of vintage brown transferware. But they're also different—a variety of shapes and sizes means the grouping isn't so uniform as to be repetitive and boring.

Make Arrangements

KI SHARES A FEW SECRETS FOR CREATING BEAUTIFUL MOMENTS IN YOUR ROOMS WITH THE THINGS YOU LOVE.

Start with objects that have inherent beauty and integrity, especially vintage, found, reimagined, and handmade pieces.

When you begin an arrangement, first remove everything from your shelf or table. Then, place the largest object first as a visual anchor.

Add variety by rounding up items that present a mix of materials, heights, and weights.

Use trial and error. Try different groupings, tweaking away until the arrangement feels right to you.