

WELCOME HOME

A Cozy Minimalist Guide to Decorating
and Hosting All Year Round

MYQUILLYN SMITH

 ZONDERVAN
BOOKS

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Welcome Home

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FOR EMILY

Here's to letting it be easy.



Summer and winter and
springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in
their courses above
join with all nature in
manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness,
mercy, and love.

—Thomas O. Chisholm,
“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”



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IMPERFECT,
SIMPLE
ABUNDANCE



The trickiest thing about writing
about hospitality is that it requires
using the word hospitality.

—Shannan Martin, *The Ministry
of Ordinary Places*

Yesterday I ran into a Starbucks and even though it's only
August 19, there was a sign out front that said "Eight More Days to PSL." That
would be the pumpkin spice latte, for those who just woke up from a decade-
long coma. Fall is just around the corner, and we the people are counting down
the days. That first glimpse of pumpkins and mums at the farmers market is
so exciting.

This isn't just fall behavior. If I'm house shopping with a realtor, I point
out the perfect spot for the Christmas tree in every house we tour. Even if it's
March. Oh, it's March? You'll find me outside in my coat stalking the daffodil
shoots with a pair of scissors, waiting to cut that first bloom to bring inside
and brighten up my kitchen. I'm almost always looking forward to the next new
season, and I adore being surrounded by seasonal goodness in my home. If
you're like me, you enjoy looking forward to the change from season to season,
and one of the best perks is that you get to add some different seasonal
touches to your home. Cue the bins!

Oh, those bins. We've got bins full of cute decor stored away for fall,
Christmas, maybe even spring and summer decorating. The stores are on
to us. They know we're invested in making sure each season is represented
in our homes, and every year they seem to devote more and more square
footage to decor for the coming season. It's so easy to believe the lie that
stores, Instagram, and Pinterest sometimes whisper that every inch of our
homes must be redecorated from top to bottom every three months in order
to honor the season.

As much as I want my home to feel connected to the season that's
happening outside our walls, I'm not willing to devote more time, money,
and storage space than what's needed to get the look I'm craving. I'm guess-
ing you feel the same way. Welp, you've found the perfect companion.

Recognizing each season and letting our homes reflect the seasons as they come is a way to cultivate life-giving homes that feel connected to the world.

This book will completely transform the way you decorate for the seasons. You'll no longer be a slave to bins, your home will feel congruent with each season, and this change will have a profound effect on the way you use your home. What good is a warm, welcoming, pretty home if it's sitting empty all the time?

I find that people like us, who love all this seasonal decorating, are usually the same people who put a high value on the idea of inviting people into our homes. We long for our homes to be ready to host community groups, baby showers, graduations, and of course holiday gatherings throughout the year. Most of us want to get our homes looking the way we've always hoped, not so that we can show off but so that we can use them the way we've always dreamed. As people who value celebrating the seasons with a natural tendency to notice and appreciate the visual, we sometimes put a higher standard on ourselves when it comes to feeling like our homes are ready to open up to people.

If you've ever felt like your home isn't ready for hosting, you are going to be delighted with the connection between creating a seasonal, perennial home and having a hostable home. Recognizing each season and letting our homes reflect the seasons as they come is a way to cultivate life-giving homes that feel connected to the world. To have a seasonal, perennial home means there are certain rhythms throughout the year that dictate how we use our homes and how our homes serve us. It's taken me twenty years to pay attention to how our family uses our home differently throughout the year, but once I was quiet enough to listen, I realized how simple it could be to have a seasonal home. I've learned that when I had the right focus while getting my home ready for each season, I was actually setting it up to make it ready and easy to host. What?! This was the most wonderful discovery!





It's the same in every episode of *House Hunters*. First comes the not-at-all funny joke about how the wife gets the big closet and the husband will take the micro linen closet in the hall. Then the couple goes on and on about how important it is for them to "entertain." They entertain a lot, so they need a big dining room; they love to entertain, so they need a fun back yard; they've got to have a finished basement because, entertainers. And the show always ends as the couple is slicing cheese and clinking wine glasses with a bunch of friends who look at them and their newly purchased house with admiration.

That's when I look around at the fixer-upper we've lived in for seven years and realize we've never clinked wine glasses over a dining room table filled with assorted cheeses as we entertained admiring friends. I also wonder how often those house hunters entertained friends after the TV crew left town.

We all move into our homes with great intentions to entertain. But entertaining can also feel daunting and grown up and fancy and reserved for people with accents and ascots and maybe yachts. I show off and you sit back and watch, which means the pressure is on me. To entertain means I need to have it all together. Entertaining is all about what I can present to you, and the tricks I can come up with to keep your attention and your admiration.

But here's the thing. For most of us, it's not really entertaining we care about. What we really crave and hope to provide in our homes is hospitality. Hospitality feels welcoming, warm, simple, and as is. It's about mutual receiving.

Hospitality is grace with throw pillows.

Hosts receive guests into their homes, guests receive care, and both receive connection. Hospitality is grace with throw pillows.

Entertaining is about the host, but hospitality is about the guest. This makes all the difference for us regular folk, because if we have to wait around until things are perfect to invite anyone over, we'll never do it. But if we choose to make hospitality a priority, we can start right now with whatever we have.

Come as you are, and I'll meet you as I am.

I one hundred percent believe you can invite people over tonight and not even care about the state of your house. You can serve your guests whatever meat will expire tomorrow and have a meaningful, wonderful, great time. I also believe you can throw an elaborate dinner party in which every detail has been



thoughtfully prepared, and do it all in the name of connecting with your guests so they feel honored and loved.

Most of us are looking for something between the last-minute invitation and the fancy dinner. We want our homes to be in a functioning state so it's hospitality ready. The truth is, we won't invite anyone over if we hate the way our houses look. We might feel guilty about it, but we still won't do it. We also want our guests to feel thought of, cared for, and connected with, and we want to easily fit hospitality into our already full lives. We want to be the one who volunteers her home for gatherings and who has just enough of a plan with just enough freedom that doing so doesn't stress her out.

So how do we do that? We start by shifting our mindset.

TWO MINDSET SHIFTS

Two mindset shifts have made all the difference in how I feel about decorating and opening up my home. First, I decided to become an imperfectionist who



believes that my house doesn't have to be perfect to be beautiful. Second, I decided to approach my house as a Cozy Minimalist who understands how to get the most style with the least amount of stuff. I wrote one book about embracing imperfection and another about cozy minimalism, and if you haven't read them, you will love them. For now, I'll give you a quick summary, because understanding and embracing these two mindsets will help you to become the decorator and host you've always known you can be.

The Imperfectionist Mindset

The first mindset shift is becoming an imperfectionist. I confess I came by this mindset the hard way.

Years ago, I more or less told a dear, sweet friend that I absolutely did not trust her. We had just pulled into my driveway after doing something together, and she asked if she could come in and use my bathroom. I told her no. It wasn't because it was messy—I could have run in and grabbed the underwear off the floor. It was because I carried deep shame over the one-hundred-year-old house we rented and the outdated state of it. She and her husband lived in a new house in a nice neighborhood. My house was in the bad part of town, had been a rental for years, and had bright orange Formica counters and a weird bathroom that looked like a serial killer grew up taking showers in there.

I thought I was protecting myself by not letting her come in, but really, by not allowing her to see my bathroom, I was telling her she couldn't be trusted with the imperfections of my life, which is why I went to great lengths to hide them. I was telling her that I expected she would judge me. To this day, I'm still embarrassed to admit that's what I did. I wish I'd had the courage to invite her in. She would not have cared, I would have seen that, it would have solidified our friendship, and I could have started to deal with my perfectionist ways earlier. Instead, I held her at arm's length and we never really got that close.

The truth is, there actually are some people in the world who can't be trusted with the imperfections of my life, but usually, I'm not friends with them. The untrustworthy ones aren't dropping me off at my house with a hug and asking to use my bathroom. Why be friends with people I can't trust to see my mess? If not them, then who?

Hospitality is a high form of trust. It says, *Here's my mess, here are my unfinished things, and here's the truth about me. Knowing you better is worth risking your knowing me better.* Inviting people in is trusting they can handle that. When we open our doors to our friends, essentially we are saying, *Welcome to my home, where things aren't perfect. I trust you can relate.* We tell them to come as they are, and we choose to let them see us as we are.

The great thing about allowing people to see a little imperfection is that it fosters connection. If everyone pretends to be perfect, it's exhausting and surfacey. Once someone goes first and shares something deeper, then a real connection happens and trust begins. Imperfection plays a huge role in our lives, and it's so vital in helping us form healthy relationships that we'd be crazy to banish it.

Becoming an imperfectionist—being able to see the benefits of not trying to be perfect or pretending things are perfect—is the first step to becoming a gracious, others-focused host. Once we realize that we can partner with our imperfections to help us connect with others, it not only changes how we view hospitality, it also changes how we prep our houses. When we believe things don't have to be perfect to be beautiful, the pressure is off. Embracing imperfections and being content with where we are is a great first step to creating the homes we've always wanted so we can use them the way we've always dreamed. But just because we know perfection isn't the goal doesn't mean we don't also need beauty and function.

The Cozy Minimalist Mindset

The second mindset shift that will change the way you approach decorating your home is becoming a Cozy Minimalist.

When we moved into our fixer-upper seven years ago, I knew I needed a logical approach to decorating that solved all sorts of issues. First, I needed to incorporate stuff I already had. This is real life, and there would be no buying a houseful of new furniture like they do on TV. I needed to decide where to focus a limited budget, which meant I needed to prioritize what to tackle first and where to use temporary fixes. And I desperately needed to free myself of a secret hoard of decorative thrift-store finds I had collected over time.

I needed a plan that would allow my style to come through naturally.

I didn't want my love of pretty things to make my life more complicated. I needed to know where to focus my time and money in our home, what to keep and give rid of, and how to do it all based on how our family lived.

I needed the most amount of style with the least amount of stuff. I didn't have time to dust pretend plants, babysit delicate throw pillows, or stand guard over a pristine sofa. I needed a foolproof method I could trust to help me make decisions. Then I needed to apply it and be done enough to relax and finally use our home the way I'd always hoped.

I wanted all the pretty layers and storied goodness a well-lived-in and well-loved-on home has to offer. Give me all the pillows and cushy throws, please. But at the same time, I craved simplicity. The freedom of keeping only what we truly needed, loved, and used sounded extravagant and risky and glorious. Maybe I was a minimalist?

I was intrigued by the possibilities, but then I'd catch a glimpse of a minimalist home that scared me. As enticing as the minimalist movement was, some of those homes seemed like the opposite of inviting. There were no throw pillows, no rugs, no drapes, and no coziness.





I needed a balance of inviting coziness with graceful minimalism. Without purpose, minimal becomes cold and cozy becomes clutter. I was stuck in some weird design space that valued both abundance and simplicity. Both coziness and minimalism. And that's how I became a Cozy Minimalist.

Cozy Minimalists want to live in a world where there is room for plenty. Where meaningful collections are admired and loved and passed on through generations (if they want them). Where parties have oodles of hors d'oeuvres and piles of fruit and cheese on the platter. Where there is more than enough room for us to find a seat and get comfy, and where we, in turn, can share that abundance with others.

But we also love the invitation offered by a cleared-off surface, the freedom not to have to hang something on every wall just because it's empty, the discipline to know when to stop, and the reality that living with less makes our lives so much easier. We need both the cozy and the minimal in our homes. When we decide to be cozy in a minimal way and minimal in a cozy way, we are able to make informed design decisions that create a balanced home. When we embrace the gift of imperfection, we create a graceful home that allows others to connect.

If the idea of minimalism makes you think you'll have to go without, here's another small mindset shift you can make. Instead of focusing on what's lacking, think about minimalism as simply having enough to meet a goal. You and I get to decide on the goals for our homes. That means we can edit out anything that doesn't move us closer to meeting those goals.

When I edited out some things in our family room, the extra space somehow magically translated into space in my life. I started to appreciate walls with less stuff, rooms without clutter, and cleared-off surfaces. Suddenly, home didn't demand extra energy I didn't have. It took less time to clean and gave our family some breathing room. I was captivated by the combination of inviting coziness and graceful minimalism. I learned how to use just the right amount of decor and how to make smart decorating decisions, all through the lens of cozy minimalism.

If I had understood the power of being an imperfectionist and a Cozy Minimalist all those years ago when my friend asked to use my bathroom, I easily could have said yes to her coming in. I would have trusted my friend,

and I would have understood that even though I couldn't renovate our rental-house bathroom, there were a few tiny changes I could have made that would have allowed me not to hate that room. I might have been able to like it just by adding a simple white shower curtain, a pretty plant, and a set of cushy towels. But I assumed it was all or nothing, and since I couldn't have an entirely updated bathroom, I had to hide it.

Embracing imperfections makes you a more gracious host to both yourself and others. Becoming a Cozy Minimalist makes you a more confident, balanced decorator. Together, they allow you to get your house looking the way you've always wanted so you can use it the way you've always dreamed.

Most of us aren't trying to make our homes look pretty so our neighbors will be jealous. We want to love our homes so we can use them. We want our homes to look lovely so we can stop thinking about them already. And one simple way we can have homes that look beautiful, fresh, and inviting year round is by incorporating seasonal touches without going overboard. This is your invitation to create some seasonal rhythms of change in your home so it's always ready to welcome you, your family, and your friends.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I wrote this book so you could pick it up and read it one part at a time as each new season comes around. Although, if you want to read it all now, by all means go ahead. But it might feel something like hearing Christmas carols in July. Unless, of course, you live in the southern hemisphere, in which case Christmas and summer weather go hand in hand. Because I live and write in the northern hemisphere, that means readers who live on the other half the world will have to flip the seasons with the holidays. There's no getting around this. Dumb hemispheres messing with this book. My apologies.

The book includes four parts, one for each of the four seasons. Each part includes two chapters—one that focuses on decorating for the season and another that focuses on hosting the celebrations of that season. My hope is that before you unpack that bin of seasonal decor, you'll take a few minutes to read the two chapters dedicated to the season you're about to enter.



Your house might not be perfect, but your hospitality is exactly what we need.

This is your reminder of what to focus on and what not to worry about when it comes to creating a seasonal home that's ready to welcome people.

Simple abundance and imperfection with purpose will be our guides.

There will be no elaborate DIY projects, no precise measurements, no expensive one-time-use party supplies, no servers in color-coordinated outfits holding plates of thirty different appetizers you slaved over.

We don't have time for that.

This is for those of us who want our homes to feel seasonal without taking over our lives. Who want to throw a party so we can laugh with people we love while eating a good meal that didn't take a team of professional chefs to prepare and plan. Who want inviting people over to be so easy that it doesn't require weeks of planning beforehand and multiple naps afterward.

Here's my promise to you: reading this book will not leave you feeling like you have to wait a few more years before you enjoy and open up your unfinished home. Instead, I want you to close this book feeling energized and full of fresh motivation to invite someone over next week.

When it comes to decorating, hospitality, and being okay with your less than perfect home and life, you are ready for this. You don't have to fall into the trap of overplanning, overthinking, overspending, and overdecorating to the point that even the thought of having people over is overwhelming. No. We're gonna keep it so simple.

When it comes to welcoming people into your home, your house might not be perfect, but your hospitality is exactly what we need.