

welcome

The Luxury of Waiting

I'LL TELL YOU what's really worth the wait: a little wisdom.

I've been editing this magazine for ten years, and while I've been learning about design and decor, antiques and art, I've been going through the sorts of things many of us go through: divorce, raising children, losing loved ones, serious illness. My sense of home has been shaped by these experiences. So has my sense of priorities.

I've gotten a few snarky comments about some of the letters I've written to readers in the last year. Though they are in a tiny minority, there are people who don't want *House & Garden* to look at the big picture. "If I want to read about global warming," wrote one person, "I'll look in the newspaper." Good idea, I say. Read it and weep. But it does matter that you can read about climate change in these pages as well. We are gardeners, after all, who care about the earth and its plants and creatures. And it matters that we discuss the toxicity of the food we eat or the materials we build with—we build beautiful kitchens, after all, to nurture those we love. Why? Because all the building, and renovating, and decorating, and shopping, isn't worth a thing if we aren't turning around and engaging with our world to make it a better place to call home.

There's something in the air these days that has to do with a sense of wanting to reconnect with a value system that is deeper than what's on sale. Perhaps it's simply that the news about how we are fouling our planet has grown impossible to ignore. Perhaps it is an encroaching dismay about the cruelty we inflict on animals so that we may eat. Maybe it is because our children are growing up, heading out into the world on their own, without our protection. Many of us are becoming obsessed with thoughts about what kind of world we are going to leave behind—and what have we done to help, or hurt?

I am not renouncing materialism anytime soon. That's an unreasonable solution for most of us. I may feel I need less than I did a decade ago, but that's only normal as I'll soon be running a smaller household. I may want less, but I also want things that are better—I'm impatient with spending money on

something that I know will fall apart before too long; I want out of the endless cycle of purchasing and discarding. I'd rather wait longer and get something that is sturdier, and probably more distinctive. More importantly, I want to support people who devote their lives to making things—who blow glass, or weave fabrics, or throw pots, or build furniture. These things are now worth the wait, for me, because I understand, finally, that to wait is a luxury. It is when you are young and impatient that you don't understand the value of waiting, even though you have lots of time. When you are older, and all too aware of how little time is left, you suddenly realize what a special thing it is to anticipate, to delay gratification. I used to read books quickly, dying to get to the end of the story. Now I can't slow down enough, living through the story. I *want* to wait.

But to get to the deeper values: A home can be—should be—a place of retreat. But the reason I want my house to be beautiful, and to feel safe and secure, is that it gives me the grounding to venture out into the world. Design for a well-lived life doesn't stop at the door; it only begins there. A good life is one of citizenship, engagement, and participation in our world. Design, arguably, begins with solving problems, large and small, and elaborates from there: where to put the clothes; how to dig a well; where the picture window belongs; how to burn fuel efficiently. What should a chair—or a car,

or a bed, or a phone—look like? Who is going to be using it? Where? Decorating can't be divorced from reality and still feel compelling, vital, and alive. The garden is the perfect place to understand this. You can create a paradise, raising up out of the earth the seemingly infinite variety of shape and color and texture with which we are blessed. But as you watch your tender shoots wilt and burn in a sun that has grown too hot, you realize that you cannot shut out the world. And it becomes time to go out and fight for all that we love.



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