

HOME MADE LOVELY

Creating the Home You've Always Wanted

SHANNON ACHESON



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To Dean, Jonah, Lillian, and Megan.
Home is wherever I'm with you.

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INTRODUCTION

I LOVE A PRETTY HOME, DON'T you? It's something I've always loved—even as a teenager living in my parents' house. Like most women, I'm most at peace in a home that is well-organized, beautiful, and clutter-free. I also love to decorate and fluff and move things around to create lovelier spaces.

I've learned that we decorate our homes for all sorts of reasons. Some of us do it to impress the neighbors and keep up with the Joneses (whoever they are). Some of us decorate to fill a void of some sort. And some of us decorate because we want to bring both beauty and meaning into our homes. That last group is who this book is for . . . women like you and me who want our homes to be beautiful while making our families, friends, and neighbors feel like the one-of-a-kind, genuinely loved, special creations they are. Home is our happy place. Or at least that's what we want it to be.

I also know that we often don't know where to start or how to put it all together.

If you're like me, you may have pretended that decorating your home isn't that important, even though you'd like nothing more. And you might be sick and tired of spending time and money on decorating, only to have your home look no better than it did before. And all of that can feel very overwhelming.

I've written *Home Made Lovely* partly as a decorating book. But it's not *just* a decorating book. Yes, I'm going to show you how to declutter and organize all the things in just seven simple steps so that you can function well in your home. And I'm going to walk you through the process I use to decorate every single room in my house *on a budget* in simple, repeatable steps that you can use too—even if you have no idea what you're doing when you pick up this book. I'm also going to talk to you about hospitality and loving on your friends and neighbors.

Home Made Lovely is different than other decorating books because I believe

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15 ESV)

that decorating our homes should be about those that reside inside them, not creating a magazine-worthy spread. That before we decorate anything, we should first consider ourselves, our family, and our heavenly Father. I believe that creating a peaceful and welcoming home begins by clarifying who you're decorating for, being thankful for the home you have in this season, and *deliberately dedicating it to God*.

With that foundation in place we can do all those other things I talked about. We can choose a style, create a whole home decorating plan, and make it look pretty and welcoming. All without the overwhelm.

Throughout these pages, I'm going to show you how to:

- decorate in a way that suits your family's *real life*
- do a house blessing and dedicate your home to God
- practice being thankful for the home you have in your current life season
- declutter and organize everything before you decorate, and/or whenever it's needed again
- decorate your whole home step-by-step, in the correct order, one room at a time (as your time and budget allow)

Plus, I am going to share more than twenty simple hospitality ideas to make your own family, as well as guests, feel welcome and loved in your home. You know, just to get you going.

I personally know (and hear from my readers and email subscribers all the time) how hard it is to keep a house organized when you have kids coming and going. How difficult it is to figure out your decorating style and how to pull your whole house together into one lovely, cohesive look.

If you're like most women, you want a "home made lovely" but you have no clue where to start. And on top of it, you don't want to get so concerned about the paint colors that you forget about the people. My job is to help you keep the main thing the main thing.

When you finish this book, you may wonder, *Will I have a more beautiful, organized home?* The answer is unequivocally yes!

But do you know what else you'll have? Your sanity. The peace God intended for you to have. Money left in your bank account. And, if you live under a roof with other people, you'll also have people who won't resent you but will embrace these changes right along with you.

So, let's get started, shall we?

PART 1

WHO ARE YOU DOING IT ALL FOR?



CHAPTER 1

The Most Important Place on Earth

GIVEN THAT I AM AN INTERIOR decorator, and for the last nine-plus years have written a blog mainly about decorating, it shouldn't be a surprise that my first traditionally published book is about decorating and home. It is what I know, after all. And "they" say you should always write what you know. But, as I mentioned in the introduction, this isn't *just* a decorating book.

While I'm quite used to writing step-by-step tutorials and how-to articles about organizing a home in five steps or choosing the right paint color on my blog, I find it a little harder to write about the why behind those things. Maybe because the why isn't easily boiled down into a step-by-step process or a particular number of

points. Maybe it's because I'm a teacher at heart, and I love to take big ideas and simplify them into actionable steps. It's kind of my superpower. It just feels oh-so-much more difficult to articulate what, or rather who, truly matters in a home and what that means for decorating, than it does to write "8 Steps to Make Your Home Look More Stylish on a Budget." (Which is actually the title of one of my most popular blog posts.)

But, as I've gotten older, I've come to really understand that it's the people—your family and mine, plus our friends and neighbors—who are the most important in our homes, with all the how-to's and decorating built around their collective wants and needs.

So, here goes.

What's So Special about Home, Anyway?

I've always believed that home is an incredibly special place. Sacred ground even, if that's not sacrilegious. I mean, think about it. Where do you most want to be after a long trip? *Home, in your own bed.* Why are grown men and women so sad when their parents sell their childhood home? *Because it's still home even after they've left it to create a home of their own.* Where do we all start from, at least according to T. S. Eliot? *Home.* Where did E.T. want to phone? *Home.* Okay, that last one is from a fictional story. But it still illustrates that even moviemakers and scriptwriters believe that home matters.

Home is our happy place—the most important place on earth, which is, coincidentally, the title of a book I read when our kids were babies.² It taught me early on in my adult life that home is about the people who live there.

It shaped much of what I fundamentally believe about home and how we should live there, *especially as Christians.*

My Home Story

Even though I mainly write step-by-step and how-to articles, I'm a heart-on-my-sleeve girl. I'm a romantic through and

through and just can't help it. I fall for all of those cheesy romantic comedy, girl-meets-boy storylines—hook, line, and sinker. Every. Single. Time. Seriously, those Hallmark Channel movies are my favorite. Fortunately, God took pity on my romantic, sappy heart and brought my husband, Dean, and I together at a young age (I was nineteen and he was twenty-three) and has blessed us with a very good marriage. That doesn't mean it's perfect. It doesn't mean we agree on everything or never argue. It just means we've learned how to lean in and live peacefully together, still very much in love with each other after three kids, eleven homes, and twenty-three-plus years of marriage. (And, if you can add, you now know how old we are. *Moving on.*)

When Dean and I got together all those years ago, we had both already been through a lot in our separate young lives. Once we were married, we both knew we wanted a different kind of home life than a lot of other homes we knew of. We vowed never to go to bed angry and never to talk about each other behind the other's back. We agreed that name calling was never allowed in our house and that we would stay together no matter what. It became my goal to make our home as peaceful and lovely as possible, at least in part through decorating.

Listen, my friend, life is crazy. You and I both know this. We move at a frenetic pace from one appointment to the next

“Home is where one starts from.”¹

T. S. Eliot

and barely have time to sit down to a meal together with those we love (more on this later). This busyness is exactly the reason we need to create a peaceful, restful home. To give ourselves, our families, and our friends somewhere to just be still.

According to a survey published in *A Journal of the Association for Psychological Science*, certain rooms can produce very tangible emotions. The 200 participants of the research were given a list of hypothetical rooms typical for an average home, and asked to choose two ambiance descriptions of each of them. Unsurprisingly, the results matched what is the conventional wisdom of interior design, e.g., the entry room should be inviting, the master bedroom reflects a sense of romance, the closet represents organization, etc.³

Interior surroundings have the ability to evoke either a negative or positive emotional response. Everything from colors, to natural elements, to ceiling height and lighting affects how we feel when we walk into a room. Our homes can be molded and shaped in a way that promotes good mood and even health.

“The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.”

Maya Angelou

Be still, and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)

The right kind of decor can create a peacefulness. We know this is true when we walk into a certain home, and even if everything isn't perfectly tidy, there's a homey peacefulness to it. We know it when we walk into certain restaurants, dimly lit with candles on every table. The way a room looks and feels settles into our spirits and can calm even the most anxious heart.

It's because of all this that I love a pretty home. My mother and I used to visit model homes just for fun on weekends and dream of the life we could live in those beautifully, if not sparsely, decorated spaces. Dean and I still do this sometimes for a different perspective and for new ideas for our own home. I mean, where else can you go to wander through an entire house that's been decorated from top to bottom? The main floor panel molding we installed in our current house, for example, was inspired by model homes we visited shortly before we moved to our home near Toronto. I thrive in spaces that are well organized and beautiful. I'm guessing you're the same, whether you're consciously aware of it or not. But I also know that a truly lovely and beautiful home should be about so much more than just how it looks.

So, Who Are You Decorating Your Home For?

An acquaintance recently told me a story. She worked as a decorator for several

years. In that time, she worked with rather wealthy clients who could afford pretty much whatever decor they wanted. She told me about one particular married couple whom she worked with; their story shares a common theme with many I've heard from other designers and decorators. This wife dragged her husband to one decor consult after another and through shop after shop to look at paint and wall coverings, rugs and furniture. Truthfully, though, the husband really didn't care which things his wife chose, or even how much money she spent to decorate their home. Do you know what he did want? At the end of the day, he simply wanted a comfortable chair to sit in. That's all. Sadly, his wife didn't allow this one thing in their "designer" house, because it didn't fit the look she was going for!

And that's the heart of it, right there. She was not decorating for him at all. Who was she decorating her home for? Was it for the neighbors? Her friends? For bragging rights? To get featured on TV or in a magazine? There's no way for us, as outsiders, to know for sure. But it certainly wasn't for her husband or their family. Which again begs the question, Who are you and I decorating our homes for?

Because I write about decor all the time and am constantly looking at photos of pretty spaces, I find it very easy to get caught up in what everyone else is doing, how they're decorating, what's new, and what's popular. Which is okay, if I truly like

*Home should make "you feel like a valued 'customer' the moment you walk through the front door . . . a safe place where you can make mistakes."*⁴

those things. But in this brave new world of Pinterest and Instagram, it's oh-so-easy for you and I both to feel like we *should* be decorating our home a certain way, depending on the trend of the moment, whether it works for our homes and families or not. (We'll talk more about trends later in chapter 5.) It's so easy to fall into the comparison trap, thinking our homes are somehow "less than" if we don't have the same things or decorate the same way as all those "influencers." (I *really* don't like that word!)

So, who are we decorating for?

The short answer for me has *always* been, for the people who live in my home with me. Of course, there's consideration taken for the guests and extended family who visit (which we'll talk about later too, in chapters 10 and 11). And because it's part of our business, I've often thought of the blog in the decor decision-making process too. But mainly, I decorate for our family of five, plus one little doggie, because we live in this space three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Because our kids are homeschooled and I work from home, we quite literally spend more time here than anywhere else. But even if I worked somewhere else and our kids left each day

for school, I would be decorating for my family first and foremost. Because this is our *home*.

What has this looked like over the years? Well, when our kids were little, decorating for our family meant that lower cabinets and drawers were filled with the kids' toys and books, and my pretty things were carefully placed up and out of the reach of tiny hands. It meant we had a black leather sofa for years, simply because it blended into the decor and was the easiest thing to clean juice, puke, and kids' boogers off of! (All you parents know what I'm talking about!) We deliberately kept furniture and decor sparse for a period of time to make room for all the baby and toddler things that seemed to daily multiply like rabbits (and only came in bright, shiny primary colors when my kids were small).

These days, decorating for our family means that we Scotchgard our upholstered dining room chairs because we want to be comfortable, but teenagers live here. (Plus, I'm a klutz and am more likely to spill something than they are.) It means the kids have always had a say in choosing their bedroom colors because their rooms are their space, even though the control freak in me *really* wanted to just choose them myself. It means I carefully arrange throw pillows on the couch and our bed because I adore how it looks, but often put them away for everyday use so Dean doesn't have to move them all just to sit down. It means we have white trim and

doors that frequently get wiped clean with Mr. Clean Magic Erasers and touched up with fresh paint because white trim makes me happy. It means our basement is more colorful than our main floor because it's a space where our teenagers and their friends hang out. I decorate for *us*.

The biggest thing I took away from *The Most Important Place on Earth* was that *home should make people feel special*. It's almost absurd in its simplicity.

What do I mean by *special*? Well, like how special you feel when your crazy dog welcomes you home. You know what I'm saying. Whether you're gone for a week's holiday or you step out to the garage for two minutes to take the garbage out, your dog is *always* so insanely happy to see you that he wiggles his bum and wags his tail so hard he almost falls over. Like you're the most important person on earth. *That's the kind of special I'm referring to*. Your home should make you and your family feel that way too.

We can choose to *only* make our house pretty to look at. Stylish. On-trend. Filled with the things some (likely very talented) designer says we should have . . . all while making our family feel like an afterthought. But I believe that the purpose of creating a beautiful home is not so we can step back

“A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.”

George A. Moore

and say, “Look how gorgeous my house is,” like the wife from the comfy chair story. Instead, I believe we should decorate with our family as our first thought, in such a way that they feel as special as they should. After all, we are created in God’s image, and He is the Creator of beautiful things. He gives us all sorts of things in nature to bring peacefulness and joy to our lives—sunrises and sunsets, oceans, beaches, and forests. He also gives each of us the ability to create havens of love and joy inside

the walls of our home. He doesn’t demand perfection or magazine-ready designs. He doesn’t expect us to be “on-trend.” Not at all. But He does give us the command to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34–35). For me, a comfortable home is one tangible way to love the people within it. It’s a way to say, “Come home. You belong here.”

And choosing to decorate with this front of mind, my friend, is the first step in creating a “home made lovely.”