

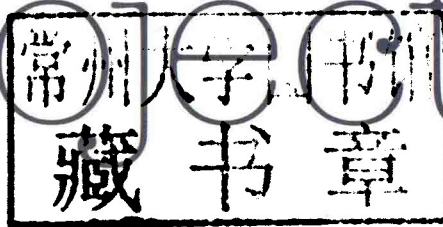
The Happy Home Project *

*A Practical
Guide to Adding
Style and Substance
to Your Home

by **Jean Nayar**

Woman'sDay

The
Happy Home
Project*



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W

Who doesn't want a happy home? When I began writing this book, my home was already happy. In fact, over the years when I was working in an office building, I would often come home at the end of the day, walk through the front door and whisper gratefully to myself, "I live in heaven."

An imperfect heaven, to be sure. But heaven nonetheless. Still, I had dreams—and many of them revolved around my home. Others had to do with my career. So I set out on a journey to see if I could make some of the dreams in both of these areas come true. And with the support of my husband, Anil; my editor and publisher, Dorothee Walliser; and my fantastic family and friends, I embarked on *The Happy Home Project*.

It began last April and was inspired by a book called *The Happiness Project*, which was written by Gretchen Rubin and supported by *Woman's Day* magazine. Knowing the time was right, I endeavored to take on a similar project, and launched a blog where I could chronicle my experiences and findings. My project, however, was targeted specifically on the makings of a happy home, where my experience lies. And I started with an ambitious wish list of home improvements, which I aimed to take on in my own home over the course of a year. In the process, I also planned to explore a wide range of cross-cultural design ideas, take them for a test drive in my own domain and report on the results. Though the journey is incomplete, much of what I learned and encountered along the way is contained within the pages of this book.

At the height of the chaos and upheaval caused by the renovation projects in our home, I was writing the chapter in this book called Spirit (hilarious, I'm sure, to the gods of irony who surely orchestrated the timing). Not surprisingly, with so many people coming and going and so much daily commotion—multiple deliveries, endless appointments, mountains of tools and plaster and floor tiles

and cabinet boxes and door handles and paint cans and debris-filled garbage bags and Lord knows what else—this was also the time when mistakes were sometimes made, budgets were overrun, tempers occasionally flared, and—in the quiet moments after the workers left but before my husband came home—tears were sometimes shed. It wasn't so much about the stress of the reconstruction, I came to realize, as it was about the change in my life in general—and much of it seemed to be just beyond the grasp of my control. My home really was a reflection of the change that was happening within me. And it was more change than I was really ready for.

Eventually, though, the calm followed the storm, and I was able to fulfill half of the wishes on my wish list. But not without heaps of help from my family and friends. In fact, as I pressed along on this journey, dozens of new friendships bloomed. And I'm especially grateful to all of the design industry friends who sponsored or supported my efforts.

While I wouldn't recommend writing a book in the midst of a multilevel home improvement project, doing so was enlightening on many levels. No one ever said life is always serene. Chicken soup is one thing, but a healthy challenge can be good for the soul, too. So frayed nerves and depleted bank account aside, I'm glad to have had the opportunity—and the support I needed—to take on this project. For the process has enriched my home—and my life—substantially. And by sharing some of the lessons learned, I hope the ideas contained in this book may brighten the way for your own endeavors.

As I write these words after completing the book, I look toward a future that is wide open and entirely uncertain, but one thing is crys-

tal clear—my closets are organized and beautiful, my walls are freshly painted and my renovated kitchen makes me really happy. Of course the material comforts, in my case, are simply the icing on the cake, for they're just a dim reflection of my real joy, which is the beauty of my simple life and the numerous and astoundingly wonderful people who fill it. Yet, mine isn't the only story with a happy ending (or, I should say, middle) in this book. Every single home and every single room on the pages that follow has a story, a message or an idea that can be of service to anyone on the road toward domestic bliss. I hope these stories will inspire you to embark on your own happy home project—and if you come through a changed person like I have, my bet is that it will be for the better.

ingredients of a happy home

Surely there's no one-size-fits-all recipe for a happy home. But after doing lots of research, taking lots of test drives, and making lots of trials and lots of errors, I've come up with a list of ingredients that I'm convinced contribute to the joy in mine. By sharing these ingredients, I hope you'll try mixing a dash of one here with a dollop of another there, combining them with your personal alchemy to see what effect they have on the happiness of your own home. Here are my ingredients:

Access to nature Nothing brightens a home like a touch of Mother Nature, whether it's a burst of fresh air, a ray of sunshine, a lakeside view or a tiny potted plant. A connection with nature reminds you that you're a part of a larger order that has rhythms and energy and laws that reflect and nourish the microcosm that is you.

Just-right spaces More than not-too-big and not-too-small, just-right spaces contain just enough stuff to make them comfortable, functional and visually appealing to you. Just-right rooms are well edited and include only things that have meaning or a purpose. They usually don't happen overnight, but rather evolve slowly over time as you eliminate and add just-right things as you go along.

Something for everyone When a home accommodates more than one person, it needs to feel like home to everyone who lives in it. Allocating nooks and crannies to different forms of personal expression can allow disparate tastes to happily coexist in a patchwork that provides room for all.

Personality If there's one thing that puts a damper on happiness in a home, it's cookie-cutter rooms. Happy rooms show something of the

personality of their owners, whether it's a collection of vintage quilts, a gutsy work of art, a handmade throw or a favorite color.

Elements of comfort To many of us, the word *comfort*—as it relates to the home—connotes overstuffed chairs, fluffy pillows and fuzzy throws. But in this context, elements of comfort have more to do with an individual's sense of beauty and the objects and colors and shapes that put him or her at ease.

Order An ordered home isn't just about having a place for everything with everything in its place. It's about all of the elements—and the rituals they support—that ease the flow from dusk to dawn, spring to fall, work to play. It's also about eliminating the inconsequential and celebrating the essential. As a landscape designer I know says, "More of less is always a good thing."

Private zones In his classic work *The Poetics of Space*, the philosopher Gaston Bachelard argued that the chief role of a home is to serve as a place for daydreaming. Private spaces, whether a room of one's own, a window seat or a corner in a garden, let intimate dreams unfold.

The element of surprise. A surprising element in a home can take on all kinds of guises. It might be a whimsical pop of color, a mysterious garden path or a witty work of art—anything that shifts the energy of a space and engages the imagination.

Carbon-footprint consciousness An eco-friendly home will not only make you happier because you're being a good global citizen, it'll make you, your family and the planet healthier. And it can save you money over the long haul, too.

A sense of spirit Spirit in the home is about a connection to something beyond the material things that define and fill it. It might be a sense of kinship with the imagination of the people who made the furniture or art in your home. It might be a feeling of community that occurs in a home that's shared with friends and family. Or it might be a sacred sensibility symbolized by a fountain, a statue, a stone or other emblem that represents your view of the divine.

—Jean Nayar

Note: As I finished writing this book, I managed to accomplish about half of the 20 projects on my wish list. To see the complete list, visit my blog, TheHappyHomeWorkshop.com, where you'll find posts on my experiences along with reporting on design industry news in general.



Against a neutral backdrop, a mix of furnishings from Hickory Chair in a classic blue-and-white palette establish a sense of harmony, with lightweight pieces balancing heavier ones and dark colors contrasting with light ones.

style

A well-crafted home is much more than the sum of its parts—its rooms, stairways, chairs, tables, tiles and curtains. It's a unified ensemble that reflects your personality, nurtures your spirit and supports how you live. Viewed as integral elements in a grander scheme, the individual pieces of a house become like notes in a musical composition—each playing a vital role in the overall harmony. Establishing a clear sense of style will help you choose furnishings, materials and colors to shape a home that makes you happy.

Right: Washable full-skirted slipcovers in a relaxed stripe and a farmhouse-style table make a traditional dining room feel laid-back. Opposite: A contemporary coffee table, curtains and pillows in a fresh print, and a casual sisal rug bring fresh flavor to a wing chair and roll-arm sofas.

Clarifying your sense of style before you embark on renovating a house or decorating a room will also ease the process of shaping spaces over time. Fortunately, once you've identified and embraced your style, you can also adapt it as you go along without necessarily starting over. When you're clear about your style as a reflection of your tastes and values, it's easier to fine-tune it as you evolve and grow or as your needs change.

The pages that follow highlight a few livable styles—traditional, modern, country, global-influenced—that will stand the test of time. Yet each section includes ideas that will allow these styles to remain fluid and fresh. By identifying the elements that resonate with you, you can establish a foundation of forms and a palette of materials and colors that will help you create spaces that feel natural. And by remaining open to shapes and colors outside your comfort zone, you can create spaces that reflect not only who you are but also who you want to become.

How a room looks is one thing, but how it lives is another. In order to shape a home that will, in turn, positively shape you, you'll also need to take a look at how you and your family live and what you need to make your day-to-day activities run smoothly. You may also assess how to gradually introduce ingredients that can help you turn your home into a haven on a timetable that works for your budget and circumstances.

If you want to create rooms that are truly satisfying, flexibility and a long view should be part of your plan from the start—they'll allow you to make your investments wisely. If you start with a baseline of the best quality furnishings and finishes you can afford, you'll have a firm foundation to build upon. As your tastes change and your budget grows, you can layer in extras that enhance the quality of your life or reflect subtle shifts in your aesthetic point of view.

fresh traditional

If you're drawn to historic formal houses, then odds are you're attracted to traditional furnishings and materials, too. Maybe you live in a house that's luxurious and refined, with formal spaces rooted in European styles of the past. Or maybe you live in a Colonial- or Greek Revival-style house that's more modest in scale and architectural ornamentation. You may even live in a new structure that incorporates characteristics of historic styles. In any of these cases, these are typical features in traditional-style homes:

Architecture and finishes: Rooms with symmetrical features and layouts with elements like crown moldings, divided-light windows, wood floors and mahogany or painted wainscoting are common characteristics of traditional environments.



Furnishings: European or American antiques, such as Sheraton, Louis XVI, Regency, Chippendale or Queen Anne pieces, are typical of rooms with a traditional style. Newer variations of these furnishings, such as updated Windsor chairs or four-poster beds made of walnut or mahogany also appear in traditional-style homes. Upholstered pieces might include sofas with camelbacks, wing chairs, or chairs with rolled arms and skirts or turned wooden legs.

Fabrics and soft furnishings: Silks, linens, velvets or wools with woven patterns, such as stripes and damasks prevail in traditional rooms. Full-length draperies, sometimes topped with valances or pelmets, usually frame the windows. Slipcovers are tailored to fit dining chairs and upholstered seating and often include full-length pleated skirts and piping of other trims. Bedding may include tailored dust ruffles.







A tailored English-style leather settee offsets contemporary art and a mid-20th-century daybed and chair by Hans Wegner in the living room of this home. Floor-to-ceiling ivory cotton curtains and an Asian carpet soften the crisp lines of the double-height room.

Colors: Traditional settings usually include familiar colors, including deep reds, soothing olive or sage greens, and quiet tans, taupe, khaki, creams and other neutrals. Sometimes, though, they'll include bolder historical colors, such as bright yellow or Tiffany blue, or feature tone-on-tone schemes. Departing slightly from any of these colors—using berry red instead of burgundy, for instance—can be a simple way to freshen the look of a traditional room over time.

Landscape: Outside, a traditional home might be surrounded by manicured gardens and the lawn might include garden structures such as a pergola, an arbor or a gazebo. Alternatively, the trees and shrubs might be more naturalistic, like those in an 18th-century English garden.

◎ *Elements That Keep the Look Fresh*

Updated wing chair • Modern table or lamp • Lively colors

soft modern

Those who favor a soft modern style might be as drawn to a house designed in the mid-20th century as they are to a condo designed in the early 21st century. Lovers of modern furniture often successfully freshen traditional-style houses with contemporary pieces, too. It's all in the mix. Hallmarks of the style are clean lines, few decorative flourishes and asymmetry. Other common features of the style include the following:

Architecture and finishes: Settings with open spaces that flow into each other, asymmetrical spatial arrangements, large windows with unimpeded views and a decided lack of architectural ornamentation will put modernists at ease.

Furnishings: For modernists who regard their home as a sanctuary, rooms might be understated oases of comfort and calm with subtle neutral palettes, natural fabrics and a carefully edited mix of clean-lined Italian- or Danish-designed furnishings. A large flat-screen TV may be the focal point of the family room, where a crisp sofa or sectional upholstered in leather will likely serve as the dominant piece of furniture. A kitchen might feature an eco-conscious engineered quartz countertop or reclaimed wood or bamboo floors. A simple platform bed, topped with undyed organic bedding (or, alternatively, a graphic geometric print), would likely be the centerpiece of a soft modern bedroom. In lieu of the metal and resin pieces likely to be found in cool modern rooms, furnishings in soft modern rooms are more often made of wood.