

HOUSE RULES

t h e p o d c a s t

Episode 15: What's Your Superpower?

I'm Myquillyn Smith and this is House Rules
Welcome to Episode 15

I wasted a bunch of time when I was freshly married and a new mom waiting for better circumstances so I could finally turn our house into a home. Limitations stopped me from moving forward and sadly I believed I didn't have the resources to make meaningful change. I couldn't have been more wrong, and I don't want you to make the same mistakes I did.

By the end of today's episode you'll no longer see limitations as something to be avoided, you might even hope to have a few, and you'll know how to find your resource superpower.

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When we moved into our fixer upper we knew we'd be removing walls from the kitchen. It was the first kitchen reno of any sort we'd really ever done and I was excited and nervous. Kitchens are the most expensive room in the house to renovate and I had a tight budget. Also, what if I make awful decisions and hate everything?

Although we could remove some walls and steal some space from a hallway, we still had to work with the outline of the room. The tricky part was, the main interior kitchen wall backed up to the basement stairwell. So we had a 10 foot wall to put the stove on but about 18 inches from the left side of the stove or the range, we were unable to put cabinets there because right behind the wall in the kitchen was the top of the landing to the basement. It was truly the only place in that small house for the stairs to go. We were able to add a big island in the kitchen but it was a little bit of an eye sore - that flat, useless piece of wall to the left of the stove pretty much in the middle of the kitchen.

When you are laying out a room, especially the bones of a room, I've learned you can't go wrong creating as much symmetry as possible. You want to center things together using existing windows or doors to go off of so you can create a sense of balance. This room was tough because I couldn't create symmetry or balance with the cabinets because of the basement landing.

I had a problem that I didn't feel like I had the resources to solve. Stupid house builders. Right?

I knew what I couldn't do: we couldn't move the stairs, or move the kitchen or center the stove, and I knew the main problem was creating visual symmetry. We could do without the cabinet storage. So now this was a cosmetic problem to solve.

We figured out that behind the wall to the stairwell there was a good 8-10 inches of wasted space and that gave me my answer. We ended up opening the wall to create an inset set of three open shelves. I painted the wall in the inset black, and Chad found some rustic wood he cut into shelves. Now I had a little focal point to style. Now we had some more balance in the kitchen.

Not only that, the open shelf area was really fun to get to play with and change up every season. My white dishes popped against the black wall and it was extremely photogenic. I loved it and if I hadn't been forced to get creative because of a weird basement stairwell situation, I probably wouldn't have added open shelves to our kitchen and never ended up with a special little corner of the house. Bonus, a few years later, Better Homes and Gardens reached out and wanted to photograph our kitchen. Guess what got a close up – yep, that little recessed open shelf area that started out being the bane of my existence. Since then, I started paying close attention to the little parts of homes that often magazines feature and I realized that a lot of the times the most intriguing, inspiring and attention worthy parts of everyone's homes often began their life as a limitation.

The closet under the stairs that's too odd shaped for storage becomes a children's reading nook, or the awkward little window next to the door suddenly looks adorable with a custom window box full of flowers and trailing vines, the old telephone niche in the shell or shelf that is perfect for your favorite vase.

It's not about wishing away your limitations, rather, it's about what you do with them.

Limitations can be addressed in many ways.

I used to believe that money was the only way to solve problems, especially decorating problems.

Having a hefty decorating or house budget is wonderful but it's only one way to create change. When you have money you can hire help, you can pay for high quality items and faster shipping, but money doesn't solve all decorating issues.

In my house, there was not another place to put the stairs to the basement, this was not an issue for money to solve. Sometimes money can solve a problem, but many times a solution is better if we don't instantly throw money at it.

If you've been around me for a while you know I love this quote by Henri Matisse:

“Much of the beauty that arises in art comes from the struggle an artist wages with his limited medium.”

You are the artist and your home is art.

Let me paraphrase that quote: much of the beauty that you create in your home comes from the problems you solve with your limited resources.

So that means that lots of beauty actually comes from solving problems within limitations.

Want more beauty? Maybe you need more limitations.

Suddenly those limitations don't sound so bad. Which is why a long time ago, I started referring to them as *Lovely Limitations*.

Now when I'm faced with a weird issue in my home with no obvious way to solve it, I get a little excited: I've got a lovely limitation! And limitations, they lead to innovations. What do you do if you don't have unlimited money? Be happy! Because you have an opportunity to create beauty out of your limited resources.

What resources? Well, I think we have a lot of resources if we stop and consider them.

When Chad and I first got married I didn't have much money but we lived in Florida where the second hand furniture stores were on every corner. I couldn't believe how many stores full of old furniture there were and I enjoyed picking through them. Often the stores were so packed, the pieces were piled on top of each other up to the ceiling. And not to worry, although I didn't have the resources of money, I did have the resource of time. I could walk slowly through a store considering what we needed, looking closely at the options and comparing them with pieces from another store. I could wake up early and go to yard sales—which I often did and get to know where all the best thrift stores were. I found some of my favorite items that I still use today almost 30 years ago because I had time to look at a million pieces of furniture I didn't want in order to find the few I did.

Now if you have time, you might spend it looking through Facebook Marketplace, maybe you'll find local antique malls, estate sales and yard sales.

Unless you have a deadline, like maybe listing your house for sale or a baby being born, most of us have time, even if our lives are full. If you're like me, you might be impatient, but taking your

time can be a wonderful way to pay attention to the decisions you are making and what does and doesn't work for you. Home is not a race. There is no finish line.

I want you to know that I raised three boys and we never once had one of those laundry rooms with the individual cubbies where they could each hang their backpack, hats, coats, hockey gear and shoes. Did I love those rooms and want one? Absolutely. Did it matter in the scheme of life that we never had that? Nope. I had to get creative with where my boys put their stuff. We got an armoire for the back porch and some closed storage for jackets. I ended up with a boot tray for shoes, and for a few years my boys threw their bookbags behind the loveseat in the living room when they were done with their homework.

I created solutions that worked for us, that still let me have a pretty and functional home. Even though I never got my dream mudroom, we ended up running out of time before our boys grew up. But the goal wasn't actually to have a photogenic amazing mud room, the goal was to have a beautiful, functional home – and we did.

If you do have deadlines, no worries. That probably means you have the resource of motivation!

There are two types of motivation and one, it could feel a little bit negative, but really it's more about the fact that you might be embarrassed or have regret or it might make life harder on yourself. So if you don't have something pressing with a date, like having a baby, or maybe wanting to finish the nursery. Or you have someone moving back home or maybe you are putting your house on the market and you need to get some projects done - those are all a form of motivation.

Another type of motivation, this one's my favorite, comes from being excited about starting, working on or completing something and implementing your ideas.

This happens when you are inspired. Inspiration leads to motivation and it's my favorite type of decorating resource.

When I'm inspired to do something in my home, it's the single most powerful thing that leads to action. If I see a photo of a family room that I love and it inspires me to make changes in my room, watch out. No matter how much time, money, energy, freedom, access to goods I have, I will tap into my creativity and figure out a way to make changes. And I bet you will too. For me, great inspiration is like spinach to popeye! Or it's like when Pac Man eats the energizer pellets and becomes invincible. To me, inspiration is an energizer pellet. Watch out, limitations!

If you have other resources but don't have motivation, then nothing will really change. So, if we want change, one thing we can focus on is simply seeking out inspiration. This is why I will always love design shows, shelter magazines, Pinterest and Instagram. They are non-stop sources of inspiration, and if we use them correctly, they can be the biggest recourse for change.

There are lots of other types of resources and if you'd like for me to tell you about 11 of my favorite resources for change I created a little minicourse inside the Cozy Community that I'm going to offer here to you as a podcast listener for free. So, we'll leave the link in the show notes to the minicourse. It's a quick 20 minute, slide-based minicourse you can watch with your kids. If you are already part of the Cozy Community, you already have access to the Remember Your Resources minicourse in your library at The Academy of Home.

When you face a room full of decisions I don't want you to begin by focusing on what you don't have, I want you to be encouraged by remembering the resources that you do have. I promise you have something that will help you make meaningful change in your home today.

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This is your personal invitation to join the 100,000 people already on my weekly Cozy Minimal email list. You can expect pretty encouragement in your inbox every Thursday September through May.