

# HOUSE RULES

t h e p o d c a s t

## Episode 16: Two Things Every Home Has to Have

I'm Myquillyn Smith and this is House Rules  
Welcome to Episode 16

This past summer I was listening to the One Thing podcast and they were interviewing Ramit Sethi. He has a Netflix show and a book and he was talking about the topic of creating your own rich life. At first I was all: Rich, who even uses that word anymore? Visions of Richie Rich cartoons and sparkling Bentleys with dollar bills flying out the windows came to mind. But as I listened, I realized he was redefining the word "rich". Yes, he is totally one of those financial dude-bros, and is for sure talking about money, but as he described how to figure out what your 'rich life' looks like, it was clear this was way beyond financial.

To Ramit, rich isn't about a number, it's about purpose and quality of life.

Of course, because I see the world through house colored glasses, I had to apply his question to home.

What does my version of a rich home look like?  
What does your version of a rich home look like?

By the end of today's episode you'll know the two tools that give every room a sense of functional luxury, doable simplicity, and abundant serenity, adding richness to your home and life no matter what your financial situation.

+++

As I thought about Rameat's question and applied it to home, I considered what room in my house feels the most rich, the most luxurious but not because it's gold plated or has the best

stuff but because it allows me to use and enjoy it the most. It supports the kind of life I want. If our rich life is about purpose, then so is our rich home.

To my surprise the room that instantly came to mind was our bedroom.

Our bedroom has a bed with cushy linens, pleated drapes on the three windows, they are layered over interior shutters. There's a pair of dressers as nightstands each holding a lamp, a sofa at the end of the bed, a coffee table, a rug and a plant. And we also have a big full length mirror. That's everything. No wall art, no vignettes, no layers of bookshelves and paperwork, no gallery wall, no exercise equipment. There's no excess. It's by far the simplest room in our house, probably the simplest bedroom we've ever had, and I don't have plans to add any more to it.

When I think about what my ideal/rich/luxurious life in my house would look and feel like, I know that I want some pockets of abundance and an overall sense of serenity. But how do we achieve that?

Eleven years ago we were signing our name at the attorney's office buying our 3rd house. It was the 14th house we'd lived in because we had moved a lot and of course we rented often. But now I had a complete fixer upper where everything needed attention and the only limits on what I could do to it were set by the budget and how much I wanted to try to DIY. I thought I would feel so much freedom after living in a rental where the landlord decided what I could and couldn't do, but instead I felt frozen and overwhelmed. I needed a plan.

You've heard me say this before, and I'm going to say it again. It's tempting to believe that finding your personal style, giving it a clever name and searching for those words on Pinterest will solve all of your decorating dilemmas. Anyone who's tried that knows it doesn't really make things any easier.

If you listened to Episode 9, I talk about what is helpful to name – and help you make decisions, and that's knowing your ERA. Instead of focusing on your style, I think it's so much better to focus on the approach. We'll put the link in the show notes to that episode.

Back to my fixer upper. I longed for a home that had space to make messes and do puzzles and projects but could easily and quickly go back to feeling orderly and peaceful. I wanted a home that was abundantly warm and welcoming and also, at the exact same time I wanted a home that was simple and no fuss. And of course it had to be pretty. We all need to like our home so we can use it to the fullest, and for most of us, pretty is a must.

I started to pay attention to where I felt most inspired and I found myself loving blogs, articles, podcasts and books about minimalism and noticing how relaxed the idea of less felt. But I also realized I was reading those blogs and articles all snuggled up against my fluffy throw pillows under a cushy blanket next to a pretty reading light: all of which were lacking in almost every minimalist home photo that I saw.

I felt stuck in some awkward design space between cozy and minimalism. I decided I was going to embrace it and become a Cozy Minimalist.

Just putting those two seemingly opposite words together felt like an accomplishment. For years, I had felt a tiny twinge of guilt that I wasn't minimalist enough, that my ways were too complicated. That I needed to hire Marie Kondo to follow me around so she could kindly smack my wrists as I considered what to do next. At the same time, I was concerned that our home wasn't welcoming, warm or cozily inviting. I had always felt like I needed to choose a side, but the problem was, I saw the value in both sides.

I want to live in a world where there is room for plenty. Where meaningful collections are admired and passed down through generations—if they're wanted. 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 me to find a seat at the table to get comfortable and where I can share our abundance with others.

But, I also love the invitation of a cleared off surface, the freedom not to hang something on every wall just because it's empty, and the discipline to know when to stop. Also the reality that living with less makes my life so much easier.

I needed both the cozy and the minimal in my home. I wanted the most amount of style with the least amount of stuff. Maybe you do too.

Once I realized I wanted to be cozy in a minimal way and minimal in a cozy way, I was able to make better decisions in my home.

I wanted to have just enough furniture and beauty in my home to serve my people and get the style I'm after without overwhelming myself with stuff I have to take care of as a part time job.

I want to know where to focus my budget so it will have the most impact in creating the kind of home I want to provide for my family and friends without filling every nook and cranny just because space exists. I want the confidence to say "enough" no matter what the trends or magazines look like.

For the first twenty or so years of our marriage Chad and I moved every few years and the only way I knew to quickly create a homey feeling wherever we landed was to rely heavily on small accessories like vases, candlesticks, seasonal decor and pillows. They were cheap, small and easy to find. I longed for a home that felt personal and welcoming and comfortable. At the time, the only way I knew to add coziness was to add in more and more of those small items. If we were renting a home that was particularly not my style, I'd overcompensate by adding even more layers of stuff to draw attention away from the parts I didn't love. All of that adding in of stuff came with a job I never wanted: managing a bunch of stuff.

As stuff manager I looked through stuff, put away stuff, organized stuff, felt guilty because I hadn't organized other stuff. I would fuss at my kids because their stuff wasn't put away, I waded through misplaced stuff in our garage, piled up stuff, bought extra stuff because I couldn't find the original stuff, I asked my husband where he put his stuff and then I would sort, wash and dry other stuff.

Then I would dream about more stuff I wanted and the bigger house we needed because my precious stuff no longer fit into the house that we had. I guess my house is too small!

I never planned on being a stuff manager, it just slowly happened.

I made my life so much more difficult all in the name of being cozy and being prepared. I thought a bunch of cozy stuff was what defined my style. But I learned, cozy wasn't actually a style, it was a tool. And I think I was abusing it.

So how do we know when we've crossed the threshold and moved from coziness to clutter and chaos?

Well, one way I like to think about it is when there's no purpose, coziness becomes clutter.

When I focus on cozy for people's sake there's a stopping point.

If I want a guest room to be cozy and inviting, I know how nice it is to have an extra fluffy comforter folded at the end of the bed, something on the windows for privacy, some cushy pillows, maybe a rug so when you put your feet on the floor they don't get cold when you step out of bed, a surface and a lamp – most likely with a shade to provide filtered gentle light. And that's going to be the first and last thing the guests use when they go to sleep or when they wake up.

Beyond that, when I keep acquiring more and more and more stuff without a goal, that's when coziness can quickly turn into clutter. Just because I found a set of five throw pillows in the color of my guest room doesn't mean I need to have all of them. Just because there are empty surfaces doesn't mean I need to fill them all with beautiful vignettes. We actually need and deserve some empty spaces in our home, so they're ready to use and be filled up for projects, dinners, hobbies and laundry. When we're done, those surfaces can be cleaned up and ready to serve us again.

Cozy's job is to make us comfortable and comfort leads us to real connection.

But what about minimalism?

For years I associated the word minimalism with the idea of lacking something. Maybe something that was harsh, cold, just squeaking by and suffering. When it came to creating

home, minimal seemed like the opposite of everything I held dear. But the truth is, minimal simply means enough to meet a goal. You and I, well, we get to decide what the goal is.

I finally got to experience a taste of minimalism when we moved into our fixer upper. Because we were moving walls and taking down ceilings we put about 80% of our stuff into the barn on our property and lived with the barest of essentials. I was shocked at how much I loved it. It was so easy to keep clean, and because I got to choose what we had in the house, those barest of essentials, instead of like a 20 year old card carrying minimalist bachelor in a black uniform choosing, I made sure that we also brought in some lamps, a rug, a few throw pillows to soften the corners of the sofa. The room was the perfect combination of comfort and simplicity. It was cozy, yet minimal. I had my first cozy minimalist space and in the midst of construction with plastic walls, my house felt more peaceful and under control than ever.

Minimal's job is to provide space and margin for life.  
Cozy's job is to provide comfort.

If we make it a priority to include function and beauty while we focus on Cozy and Minimalism, we have the recipe to create our dream home that adds to our beautiful rich life.

My bedroom feels luxurious to me both because of what it has: lots of comfort and beautiful function, and because of what it doesn't have: excess and clutter.

I guess in my bedroom I have a lower threshold for stuff. Dana K. White calls that your clutter threshold. In my family room, I have a lot more cozifiers and I love it. We each get to decide what we want. Over the years my stuff threshold has changed and I'm sure yours has too. In order to feel like your house is serving you with the perfect amount of cozifications and margin, it's important to pay attention to how you feel in every room and if their decor is adding to or subtracting from your sense of well being and functionality..

As much as I love looking at the McGee and Co and Jayson Home catalogs, I truly don't believe that I need to have all new stuff from their stores in order to create a home that feels "rich" to me. Remember, if you redefine the word rich, it's not about fancy finishes and high end pieces. It's about a full life that allows you to function in a way that meets your goals. Maybe you're closer than you think? I was and I didn't even realize it. Maybe in order to get there you don't need to actually add anything, what if you simply need to subtract some items?

What does your rich home look like? And how do the tools of cozy and minimal play a part?

You don't have to decide between cozy and minimal.

You can take the best parts of what cozy has to offer and pair them with the benefits of minimalism and the result is a beautiful, peaceful, and functional home.

I'll leave you with a quote from my new book called House Rules that releases in April, I'll tell you a lot more about it soon.

And actually this is not even a quote but one of the 100 encouraging, hopefully memorable, House Rules that make up the book. This one I'm still wrapping my head around and I admit, it's a privilege to get to choose less. Here's House Rule number 11: Luxury isn't about having more, it's needing less.

+++

Much of this content can be found in my book Cozy Minimalist Home and in my private community The Cozy Minimalist Community, see the links in the show notes for more information.