

# THE BOSTON PHOENIX

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## HOME PAGES

GRACE BONNEY'S EPOCH-DEFINING DESIGN BLOG BECOMES A BOOK

BY EUGENIA WILLIAMSON

➤ *Design\*Sponge at Home*, the first book by the founder of the blog Design\*Sponge, Grace Bonney, is a breathtaking, byzantine 390-page encyclopedia of eclectic home décor. It's the sort of book that could solidify the aesthetic of our times — an epoch of maniacal personalization, fastidious detail, a fetishistic reverence for mid-century pieces, and an irreverent mingling of period styles.

"This book is going to be like a design Bible," Bonney tells me in a phone call from her Brooklyn home.

In her introduction, Bonney lays out the simplest of credos: "Great design doesn't have to come with a high price tag or require a professional degree." Although home magazines promote the same ethos, there's an important distinction between Bonney's philosophy and that of *Better Homes and Gardens*: the word "great." Design\*Sponge readers, not content to stencil ducks on bathroom walls, want to decorate with taste and individuality — in other words, like designers.

Professional interior design began around the turn of the 20th century. Then, as now, interior designers bestowed their impeccable tastes upon their moneyed clients; women's magazines gave middle-class homemakers the tools to feather their own suburban nests

in the fashions of the day.

Design blogs do the same — but instead of prefab suburban tastes, they reflect urban values like craft, invention, and thrift. What has emerged is a new kind of eclecticism. Bonney sums it up when she lists some favorite pieces: "a classic red Eames chair, some gorgeous shelving from France, and a handmade wooden coffee table that I had stumbled upon in a student design show."

With almost half a million monthly visitors, Design\*Sponge is among the most successful blogs in a crowded field; no less than Jonathan Adler blurbed the book. Bonney's popularity stems from her heavy involvement with the DIY design community, an ever-expanding circle of crafters, designers, and bloggers. She regularly promotes small-business owners on the site.

"She's a fantastic conduit!" says Carrie Siegel, the Malden-based co-owner of the stationery company Two-Trick Pony.

Lately, Bonney's biggest challenge is her own attention span. "If you talk about chairs for seven years, after a while, you're going to want to talk about new things," she says. "I'm trying to find ways to insert the things I care about that aren't design-related into the blog in a way that makes sense."

For example, a few months ago, when Bonney wrote a 3000-word response to a *New York Times* article about online design magazines, in which she broadcast her ambivalence toward traditional print media. "I think traditional media has had plenty of time to write bloggers and online media off as some sort of disparate group of yappy girls who talk and don't say anything important," she wrote.

Nonetheless, as a piece of traditional media design, *Design\*Sponge at Home* is beautiful object. Bonney made sure of that.

"One of the big reasons I went with Artisan was because they let me work with my own design team," she says. "Most design books have a photo of a house on the cover and one picture of a living room [per page], and text, and that's it. It didn't feel right to me."

She says she insisted on gold foil for the jacket, even though it added \$3 to the price of each book. "I felt that little pop of something shiny was the girly thing that was missing to the cover," she says. ☺

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GRACE BONNEY WILL SIGN BOOKS ON SEPTEMBER 14 AT WEST ELM, 160 BROOKLINE AVE IN BOSTON.



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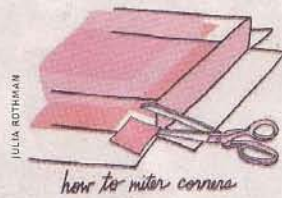
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BETTINA PEDERSEN



JULIA ROTHMAN

**SOAKING IT UP** Whether it's upholstering furniture, redecorating a library, or dressing up a room's smaller details, Bonney's book brings the "great" to great design.