

Grace Bonney: 00:10 Hey, and welcome to Good Company. A podcast at the intersection of creativity and business. I'm your host Grace Bonney. I'm the founder of the new print magazine Good Company, the blog Design Sponge, and the book, In the Company of Women. This podcast is all about talking honestly and openly about the ups and downs of working in the creative world. We'll be talking about life, work, money, creative blocks, contracts, working with friends, and so much more. This week we're talking about career longevity, how to stay relevant, and most importantly, how to stay inspired in the always changing world of social media. And we're talking with the woman who inspired me to do what I do. Designer Genevieve Gorder.

You might recognize Genevieve from her work on Trading Spaces, one of her many shows on HGTV, or her beautiful line of home goods. Today, she's walking us through her career from her early days at MTV, to her brand new show on Netflix. So, let's get started. Thank you so much for talking to me.

Genevieve G.: 01:12 First of all, anytime, and I love you. And we've known each other for much longer than I think I even realize. Probably 10 plus years.

Grace Bonney: 01:20 Yeah. And it's funny because I feel like I've known you for even longer, for watching you on TV, and-

Genevieve G.: 01:25 Voyeuristic relationship happened long before.

Grace Bonney: 01:25 Yes I know.

Genevieve G.: 01:28 I have a lot of those in my life.

Grace Bonney: 01:30 I'm very sure that you do.

Genevieve G.: 01:32 I'll take it.

Grace Bonney: 01:32 Yeah. No, but its been so nice to watch your career evolve and I'm really excited to kind of talk more about where you are now, and what you're working on, and how design has kind of woven through all of that. So I want to start with Trading Spaces, just because it is the place that I first met you online. And it's the project that not only I think inspired people like me to discover what design even is in the first place, but that really has kind of made you such a household name. And you rejoined us again this year on television for a few episodes.

Genevieve G.: 02:06 I did. Trading Spaces is how I think most of the world knows me at this point. I really didn't know how powerful it was until recently. I always knew it was the biggest platform I'd ever have in my life. You can only do the first something one time. And we did that with design television, and not knowing what we were creating, and it was a movement. And it ushered in a whole genre of shows, as well as more importantly introduced design to first off a lot of children, who are now designers, and generations of people that didn't know how much they loved it until they saw it.

So I find that so incredibly rewarding. And something that I'd never say, oh I wish they would know me for something else. You know, like an actress. No, I understand what this was. And I could probably design the first house on the moon, but I'd still get asked about Trading Spaces when I got there.

Grace Bonney: 03:10 I don't know if I've ever even asked you this question. How did you even get on the show? What was that process like for you.

Genevieve G.: 03:17 It's so random. And television at that time for designers, because there really wasn't television for us, by us. Oh, so that's so FUBU. It was never a goal. I loved to present, I loved to teach, I loved to bring the design work to the client, but that was one of my favorite parts of the process. However television was not a thought until I got a call at my desk. I was working in a design studio in Manhattan. Making incredible stuff with an incredible company, but for like \$30,000 a year, and I was working 85 hours a week. And that was part of the hustle of that time in your life, 20, 21, 22. I got a call asking if I'd like to join this show called Trading Spaces in Knoxville, Tennessee. And I was like join what where? No. Interior design felt very stodgy and very formal. It was Designing Women, an old sitcom we used to watch back in the Gen X days of the 1900s.

Grace Bonney: 04:22 The Sugargbaker women. We know them well.

Genevieve G.: 04:26 Sugarbakers. Yeah, it felt not cool. So it wasn't something I strived for. But I had designed Tangueray 10, a bottle of gin, at the time that won all these nerdy design awards. And I got noticed for this. And which is why they asked me, not knowing how old I was, what I look like, or if I could design a room per se. And so I went to the audition, they convinced me after seeing the English version where it was very hands on. And it wasn't about money. I don't come from money. And so I'm always the people's advocate for design. I know how to do a palace with my eyes closed. I'd prefer to do someone who just

got their first house. Because it's magic. And it felt like magic on that show. So they interviewed 5,000 of us, and they chose six. And here I am, 20 years later, 18, 19 years later.

Grace Bonney: 05:20

I didn't know they interviewed 5,000 people.

Genevieve G.: 05:22

It was such a hit in the UK, they knew that this was going to be a smash. They had a good inkling. And so they really went through the decks of all designers across the country. I had no idea what this was going to be. But you know, soon you're paparazzi'd and you're getting carted around in empty trashcans with tarps over them, because there's 5,000 people outside the house waiting to see you when you go in to shoot your job. Which is bizarre, and there's nobody or nothing ... Martha couldn't prepare you for that. You know, Bob Vila didn't know. So it was a new movement. One that we could only relate to each other. And so being asked to come back 18 years later ... When I heard the show was coming back, I didn't know we were going to be asked. And they asked would you do it? I was like, only if the whole band comes back. You're not U2 unless The Edge is there, I mean everybody. And that was the magic, was the chemistry of that group.

And sure enough, we all got back. We're all a million times better at designing. Because we know life that much better. We're much more expensive. But to not be the boss of my own show, to be with my band, like my original band of thieves, emotionally, there's nothing anyone could say to prepare you for that. It's pretty powerful. And anywhere we go together, it's like design Moses. Like the ocean parts and everyone gets out of the way, and they're like holy shit, that's them. And I didn't know it was so like that.

Grace Bonney: 06:58

I have to say, I'm so glad that you got the whole band back together, because having watched the kind of evolution of design TV, I had a concern that they might not invite some people back because that particular aesthetic maybe wasn't of the moment. But I was really happy to see that everybody came back.

Genevieve G.: 07:17

We did because of each other. And I don't think you find that often in groups of people who work together. It's like those magic chemistries that you maybe have at four jobs in your life. I'm so lucky to have had so many of those rocket moments. This was the largest one. But, you know if Frank doesn't show up, it's not the show.

Grace Bonney: 07:37 Exactly. I didn't realize how much I missed Frank until I saw him. And I remember growing up thinking, that was not my personal aesthetic. And to watch how that show has evolved with also all of us, and having now me being through 15 years of working in design and realizing, oh, just because something isn't my personal aesthetic, doesn't mean that it's not valuable and important. And I think design in general has become so narrow right now, and what we find acceptable, and enjoyable, in both editorial and television has really gotten quite narrow. And I didn't realize how much I missed Frank, and chickens, and country chic.

Genevieve G.: 08:12 Frank is the unicorn of the whole group. And he's the oldest one, and he's probably one of the kindest souls I've ever met. And so while chickens ... And he hates being called chicken, but I always call him chicken man. His style isn't for me either. I don't know if any of the designers really have my own style, which is what makes this full deck of cards work as a full house. It's a good hand because we're all for somebody. But the audience is so much different now. Like you said, there was no Pinterest when we were first doing this. There was no Design Sponge. There were no bloggers. It was us and MapQuest, and-

Grace Bonney: 08:54 Printed out. Printed out on paper.

Genevieve G.: 08:56 Printed out. And if I didn't go to the stores in order of whatever town I was in, I was lost.

Grace Bonney: 09:02 I want to ask you one last thing about Trading Spaces that-

Genevieve G.: 09:05 You can ask me a million things about ... It'll never go away.

Grace Bonney: 09:08 It stood out to me in a way that I didn't expect, which was how different that budget felt. Because I have gotten so accustomed to seeing multiple hundreds of thousands of dollars, and a makeover that feels as if it happened in one week. And you get a brand new house, gut renovated. And then watching you, not only do things that were just much more modest in scale, but still beautiful and impactful. But you're working with \$2,000, which is significantly different. How did that feel, going back into that now, knowing the landscape is this kind of massive full gut renovation?

Genevieve G.: 09:41 I was nervous again, because expectations about what a great room looks like are so driven by the economics of that show at this point. Which is definitely the reality of design. It felt so good to go back and do 2,000. We are well trained racehorses

on that show. All of us can knock out design like nobody I've ever met in television because we learned how to do all of it in front of a camera. I can lay the wallpaper. I can miter the corners. I don't know designers who ... I'm not trying to like, toot toot, but it is rare. It's why we've lasted so long. Because we know how to do all of it, pre war, post war, I say. So pre tech, post tech. And most people just are enthusiast. As you know in the blogging world too, right?

- Grace Bonney: 10:31 Yes. That's what I loved so much about this, that I did not expect to experience. And it was a very visceral thing, where I forgot how wonderful it was to see a makeover where, not only were you really transparent about how much everything cost. Because at some point, I think it was actually Vern's room, where they were talking about redoing a large basement. And they were like, well we couldn't actually afford to buy the paint for a basement this large. And that's not something you would ever see admitted on TV. You would just assume, oh, paint is cheap, so we'll redo all of this. There were a lot of honest economic moments on the show, which I love. But your episode gave me the biggest moment of joy, where you used a brass door kick plate to create this beautiful little detailing at the top of a four poster bed. I just completely forgot the joy that is DIY. Because we don't see a lot of that on design anymore. Everything is fully made. Brand new boxes of tile. Which is all beautiful and has its own place, but you made me rediscover DIY again.
- Genevieve G.: 11:29 I was proud of that moment. It was, how do we look at ordinary things in an extraordinary way? Brass kick plates for your door are some of the cheapest way to buy that metal. If I make brass boots on a black four poster bed, that I make out of six by sixes, this is like ... The crew was all feeling this moment too. You are not alone. It was like absolutely the pure juice of what this show is about. That design is deserved by everybody, and all you need is creativity. That's the commodity. If you're creative and clever, you can turn anything into beautiful with just a little bit.
- Grace Bonney: 12:08 And it was joy. It was pure joy. It was that one little moment where everyone who seemed be on the set, that we could see as a viewer-
- Genevieve G.: 12:14 They were bawling.
- Grace Bonney: 12:15 They were so excited. And they were like this is genius, I've never thought of this. I think we've gotten so far away from those moments.

Genevieve G.: 12:15 I agree.

Grace Bonney: 12:21 And even as a lowly little blogger like me to watch people embrace that 15 years ago, and now everything is about how shiny and brand new, and store bought can this look. And I didn't even realize I missed that.

Genevieve G.: 12:33 I'm glad. I think the whole country felt that way, because the numbers for the show were ridiculous. It was like Roseanne came back, and that was one number. Oh, that had a hard fall. But we came back and it was the highest numbers that TLC had had in over a decade. And so I thought, wow, we really still need this. I think it's like the microwave is invented but we still need to know how to use the stove. And we always will go back to the homemade. There's that farm to table renaissance that will happen cyclically over, and over, and over. Yes, I know how to buy the fancy, whatever is on Amazon. It's an Amazon driven society. But what if I want to change it up a little bit? What if I want to make it? And what if it's better? Like what if it's better? And I think we only think it's better when it costs more. And that's absolutely a total fallacy. So I'm glad that you had that moment.

I like to use my hands and run the design scene. And so on that show it's like, I'm up until two. I'm wallpapering. There's no imaginary army. There's no secret elves in the back, like every other design show. There's no ghost designers. And I've never had one by the way. It's just you, and Paige, who will stay with you until midnight.

Grace Bonney: 13:53 How do you feel about risk in design right now?

Genevieve G.: 13:55 I feel like we look at home design specifically as forever. Like we never design with the intent that, maybe a part of this is temporary and this is just me right now. And like fashion, we change, and our tastes change. The way we move, what we want out of the house. Where we spend our time changes too. I don't know why we don't give our house permission to be cool or to take risks. I think because it's expensive and it's our biggest investment in life, we tend to hold back. It's not saying, you know what, go make a couch out of pipe cleaners, and call it your life's work, but why not experiment with lighting? Why not experiment with a piece of art you hang on your wall, and it becomes the focal point for six months, or a year? There's no loss in that. It's the laboratory of your life. And we are so hesitant to like experiment. I don't think there's ever a time where you shouldn't be bold, or fun.

Grace Bonney: 14:56 You've taken so many risks, and very smart ones in television. One of my favorite projects you've ever done, was a show called Town Hall. And I loved the way that you integrated community into design, in a way that I don't think we see a lot of. I think we see community members show up to sometimes take part in a one day breakdown of a house or something like that. But that particular project was so wonderful, in the sense of we're not just going to take one house and change these people's lives, we're going to think about how this community works together. Can you tell people a little bit about that project? And I just really want to know about how you see design and community intersecting?

Genevieve G.: 15:31 That's a great question. And I know that you are a facilitator of mad community design and beyond. I love that you remember Town Hall, first of all, thank you.

Grace Bonney: 15:41 It was so good.

Genevieve G.: 15:43 Well, the whole purpose and intent of that show was about saving our small towns. In a way that was based around the treasures and the aesthetics that they only behold. And so you have these teeny towns all over every state, that are a little bit ignored, and a little bit pickled. Because they've been under the radar. And so often suburban blight, or mass strip malling and development kind of just bulldoze these treasures. And I think they tell the history of how this country was developed by people from all over the world. What materials they used when we were absolutely artisans, pre war. And they tell the story of who we are. And as Americans we're so ready to knock it down, and put up new. And I definitely am a preservationist, and I grew up in pre war everything. American foursquares, Victorians, I come from an old town. So I have a soft spot. And so I thought, it's not about a designer coming in from the city and telling you how this small town should look and be, and let's attract tourist. But it was about getting the town involved, so they could be the guardians of their architecture, and of their design.

When people feel like they own it, and they own it collectively like a team, they act like an army of design for you. So I knew if I could have them have their words, go to their town halls ... That's where town, you know, the show got its name. And they could really spit about everything they like and dislike. This was incredible moments, and probably the hardest challenges of the show. Because as we know everyone has their own opinions, and no one's ever going to all like something the same way. So

it was a lot of life force in that show. It definitely was meant for a bigger network than TLC at the time, because it costs a lot to do a town. I was moving to small towns across America and working with the mayors, and the towns people and doing major improvements. It changed me, and I felt that I could do anything after this. If I can work in a small town as a big city designer, move in, and have them let me help them define who they are aesthetically, through an emotional and many different layers of define what that aesthetic is, I could do anything. This is going to be the hardest thing I've ever done.

And I think it was. You're dealing with cultures you don't know well. With small town economics that you may not be familiar with, struggle. Controversy and conflict within the town, corruption. All of it. It was like I was a politician designer for a second. I wish we'd had more money, because we could have done more. But I think what we did lasted, and it counted. And I'm still friends with all of those mayors, so I know how it's going. And then former mayors, retirees at this point. But it was a game changer. I think Extreme Makeover, you know that grandeur of design, like get it done. It was inspiring to me, but I wanted to do it on a more emotional, and very design level.

Grace Bonney: 18:59 How do you sort of see design intersecting with community in 2018? Or are there ways you'd like to see the design community sort of reconnect and support community, in a bigger way?

Genevieve G.: 19:11 The design industry is a tough nut. I think it's why it's made home design, interior design specifically, so inapproachable for so long. There is a lot of diva-ness in our industry. Which is why I didn't want to be an interior designer in the first place. However, I think television has been here for so long now, that there's been a little bit of a revolution with mass attaching themselves to design in a way that's very personal. They know their style. They have their boards picked. They know how to ask questions now. I think they are enlightened, and enthusiastic, and interested. I think it's our job as designers, more so than with the audience, because I think we already have them captive. It's about designers connecting and working together. I feel like it's such a lone wolf industry, and so competitive. And who's got what? Who's making more? And how are they doing it? And what can I do to get my name in that magazine and blah blah blah?

It's kind of gross. That's why I love to live in the TV side of this. Because it's more about team. So I think it is opening up design to a much more diverse group of human beings. And my

complaint since I got into this, coming from a very diverse background, educationally, family wise, where I grew up, I don't see everyone's face at the table regularly. And I don't like it. And I think that means that design needs to be brought in with a heavier hand into schools. And young people need to practice this from third grade on. It's not something you bump into in college. Let's think about kids who maybe don't have a college track waiting for them. But why aren't their voices the artists of home? They can do fine art, and we celebrate them in all of our museums, but where is that voice at home? It is so white, and so privileged.

I mean, I am definitely an odd duck coming into it, because yes I'm white, but I don't come from that privileged background. And it's not the one I celebrate. I am much more multi-cultural and I come from a diverse group of musicians and dancers, and I have a different voice. I am fully aware, I am now a WASP and I don't want to be one. Yes, we all have a place, but I just would love to break up the monotony. Because it's tired, and it's not what our country looks like, so why should all of our homes look like that, right?

Grace Bonney: 21:44 I want to know, what does your support team look like, at work and in real life? Because I think so often when we see somebody who's been successful and we have this outward perception of what their life might be through social media, we don't know what the understructure of that actually looks like, and how you sort of build the people who keep you afloat. So what does that support system look like for you?

Genevieve G.: 22:06 That's a good question. I mean, it evolves as life does, and our needs change dramatically throughout the years. I would say that my social wealth is one that will far surpass anything I can do in this lifetime. And it's worth so much more to me than any amount of gold. If you fall, it's about who catches you, and who's waiting. It's not about how much money do I have to pay my way out of this. Money can definitely help with medical bills and definitely makes life easier. And I am all for money too, but my people come first. So I have lots of different squads, I'll call them. I'll eternally have my family around me, and I'm very much a family person. Being the first-born kid, having had a single mom for a long time, I'm like we are sticking together, whether you're an introvert or not, we are together. So that'll always be one of my squads for sure. And I'm the gatherer. I get everyone together, and it's the more the merrier. Even if you just want to tap in and out, I will run the show so you can do that.

Second, it's all those childhood friends who knew you from the time before you were you. Before you had a filter, before you became a public commodity, before you had success. And those are some of my most cherished members of squad. Because they'll talk to me the same way they did when we were eight. And they'll call me out in a way that I never get called out professionally, and I need to hear, and I respect. You know, even if we took totally different paths in life. I have a mom squad for sure, which usually consists of pretty top notch baller females. Who are killing life and have kids. Because we speak a different language together as women. Single moms, married moms, all of them, I need everybody at the table. I have from my music days, MTV, and Prince, and I have all the musicians always around me, and always make my life cool and relevant. And push me to see new trends that I don't always see, it's always through music, that's the guide.

And then there's those professional rocket crews like we talked about. Those real magic chemistry groups, that you have at three to four jobs in your life, or maybe more if you're lucky. And MTV for me was one of those, when we were all baby designers, just getting to NY, and like struggling, scrapping, but living this like super poor glamorous life. Like we'd be at the video music awards and trying to buy a bagel, but maybe couldn't afford it. You know, we'd be hanging out with Naughty By Nature, but I haven't slept in five days because I'm working on a deadline for \$2. That crew is still with me. I take great pride in the collection that I have. Because it means that I've invested in people. They show up for me. And so when I throw a party, halfway across the world, it's not, no I don't think I can make it, it's like just tell me when.

And when I got sick, when I got Lyme, when I got Hashimoto's, I definitely have that like health crew. Birth crew, health crew, they're like synonymous. They have a different tone of voice. They have a different energy. And there's a knowing. You know, I need different kind of help. My quiet helpers are really different than my TV helpers, or my mom helpers, or anybody else. I guess that'd be my squad and they're every color of the rainbow, every sexuality, from all over the planet, with every different language, and that's what makes me most comfortable. When we're all there.

Grace Bonney: 25:57

I want to talk a little bit about your new Netflix project, and how it came to be, and tell us about all of that. Why did this project of all the ones that I'm sure get brought to your table, why did this call your name, and what does it look like?

Genevieve G.:

26:10

I wanted to do a show that was smarter than what we know. Doesn't mean better, but entertaining the brain in a way that traditional TV would say, this is too heavy, this is too cerebral. Which I get told all the time. Like I want to do the Anthony Bourdain of home. Nope, too much, too smart. You get told no, no, no, no, no, no. And I think, yeah, some if it's because you're a girl too. They don't want to attach a lot of those with your gender and pretend it's not happening, but it is. Netflix wanted to give the 3.0 to the audience who's been raised on this stuff. Yes, we forever need to introduce people to design and that traditional formula will forever communicate. But what about the people who already know? What are they watching? How are they getting fed? They're too smart sometimes for the basics. You have to give them the upgrade. And so look at how we watch regular television now with the amount of violence or the amount of sexuality. We've graduated to all sorts of levels that we weren't at in 1985, or when we were kids. This wasn't on.

Why aren't we pushing design. Food had permission to get so cool, and so provocative, and so sexy. And it wasn't what you would make for dinner every Tuesday at your house. But it was sure as hell was fun to watch and imagine. So why does home have like this cape on it of keep it cheap, keep it easy, keep it basic? Yes, there's a place for that always, but we have to fill up the pie with other pieces too. So, Netflix isn't traditional. They don't have that paradigm of home shows that they've done for decades, and decades, and decades, and have paying their bills. They had a vacancy. They had nothing. So I believe we're the first original content for home that they've done. So it was a huge learning curve for Netflix. It was a huge new learning curve for me, which I love. I need new, I need challenges all the time, or it does get old. It does get boring. And what I would make would be irrelevant. But I'm forever curious. I think it keeps me young and my eyes busy. So it's like there will always be a place, you know. There'll always be a place to put that. Whether it's on a podcast, or it's teaching in a classroom, I have to get it out.

Grace Bonney:

28:33

This is something I've always wanted to ask you, as someone who is very much their own personal brand, because we all know you from a billion different projects, but, you are also Genevieve Gorder. You are someone that people know by name out in the world. They would recognize you in a heart beat. What is the best thing, and maybe the most difficult thing about being the face of your brand?

Genevieve G.: 28:55 That's a good question. I think there's a couple things. One is that people assume you have a certain lifestyle because they've seen your face so many times. And because you have a brand that you're living the life of the rich and famous. Which is definitely not the case. I do fine, but I'm not without worry, and struggle, just like anyone else. Also, I think just the separation of privacy period, is tough. In that, you know, there are times you don't always want to be interrupted with your child, or your dinner. But that's what you kind of have to give up if you're going to venture into this world. You can't say I want it all, but not that. There are no times, there are no ways to teach manners to everybody. They don't all grow up the same. And sometimes you might be in a bathroom, and someone wants to talk to you, and they're a complete stranger and you have to let it go. Make a story. Some people have no boundaries. And you really learn that having this job.

Grace Bonney: 29:59 How do you draw any boundaries? But how do you draw boundaries in particular with your personal life and the internet? Because you do share some things online, and some things you don't. How do you find those boundaries, and are they always shifting?

Genevieve G.: 30:13 I think they're always shifting. It's a little bit of trial and error. I think I tend to follow and watch a lot of people who I respect to kind of figure out how they're doing it. And I also follow a lot of people who are followed by a lot of people, but I don't necessarily respect. So I want to see how they're doing it, to teach me the other layer that I don't want to do. Like where are my boundaries? How am I creating my parameters? I don't live by rules, but I feel like with children, I have strong boundaries. I'll share, you know, being a mother and my child, her image will dance across my platforms often, but not the intimate stuff. Not the private stuff that's just for us. Relationships with love, partners, it's a dangerous thing. Because people know you as a couple, and then when you're not, they're mad, or they're excited, or they're mean. I'm lucky I don't have a lot of "trolls". But I think that comes with being authentic. Whatever you want to bring to me, let's go. Because I'm not hiding anything. And I truly am what I present myself as. So I don't have a lot of fear with confrontation. Doesn't happen often.

Men get scary. Always have been. And they just are more so when you're a little bit more public. So you have to not give your phone number, not show your address, try and be a little bit more protective about where you are. Geotagging, no. After you've left, you put it on.

Grace Bonney: 31:44 Excellent advice for all human beings on earth I think. I want to talk a little bit about the issue of Good Company that we're working on right now, is all about money, and getting paid, and all of the very complicated issues that come along with that. And for someone like you who's had such a long, and such a successful and varied career in design, how do you stay afloat financially? And are you always kind of re-jiggering the percentages from which income comes? Because there are a lot of different things. How do you balance all that?

Genevieve G.: 32:15 Great question. I think it's something that all creatives struggle with and all of us freelancers who aren't paid a monthly stipend. A couple things that I have that I don't think are completely normal is I have a big gang of agents that set my prices. They also help curate new work relationships. They also demand I get paid. They also created prices for me that I would've never given myself. I didn't know my worth and I really credit this incredible group to show me what design is worth. It's far more than we think or give ourselves credit for.

That being said, I'm also on the creative rollercoaster of pay scales. You know, being at HGTV for almost a decade it was the last of an era. I was the studio girl. Like the Judy Garland who was owned by, whatever it was, Universal Studios, and you basically lived on the lot. And I lived in the lot of HG, did all of their shows, and was paid monthly every single month whether I worked or I didn't. And it was a very great foundation to build a life on as a creative that we don't normally have that financial reliability or forecasting of what we're going to make in a year or two years. You knew by your contract.

That was exceptional. An exceptional, fruitful time. Those days ended for HG and everywhere else, every television station. So now it's with YouTube and bloggers and enthusiasts who call themselves designers on Instagram, which is all relevant right now. It's just how far you test people. There's more people with less of a demand. So we're doing more work for less. Which, you have to be nimble. As creatives, if you're not nimble, don't be a creative. So there's been super scary times. You set up your lifestyle as one thing with your house payments and your kid and this price points that you can hit for 10 years and then you can't.

So those are some of my most inspired and monumental times, I think, in my career. And we talked about this earlier before we started this podcast are when shit hits the fan what do you do? And I am great at being a phoenix. I think I was this in many

lifetimes. When an ER situation happens I'm the person you call and I'm at my calmest when chaos is the worst. I don't always have the right answers, but I love to get big. It's never how do I get smaller to not breathe as hard and take up as much space. It's how do I get bigger to feed everybody. And there's two very distinct ways of doing that. Yes I want to become more efficient, but I don't want to hurt and hide. I want to take care of everybody and get my lion on.

So I do. And it's how are we making money now as designers? Who's doing what well? What don't I know? What tree can I shake? What private job can I get right now to just tide me over for six months? What can I say yes to that I usually say no to? What are those little jobs that you hate to do but you grew up doing to get to where you are? Do them again. Get to know the younger people in your profession. Be humbled. Be relevant. If you're too far out of all the rungs of the ladder and you just live at the top, you don't know how to dance anymore. You don't know how to climb.

So it's good to exercise. I don't always want to go down and up and down. But it's kind of the life I chose by being in A, the most fickle medium of television, and B, adding art to that, it's like how do we make it harder than that? You got to have a good attitude and some really thick skin.

- Grace Bonney: 36:07 I'll be playing that on repeat for years to come. That was so well said.
- Genevieve G.: 36:13 I hope so.
- Grace Bonney: 36:14 It's a hard balance between ... I'm so glad that you said like what were the things that you did before that got you where, and then go back and do those things. I think so often that's sold as kind of a regression or a step back, but that ebb and flow is, I think, a given versus inevitable steps up on a ladder that you never go down on. There's a lot of backwards and forwards.
- Genevieve G.: 36:36 Yeah. It's like saying to ignore Trading Spaces. It's what made me. I would never not go back and revisit things I've done. Are some of them things I'd love to leave in the past? Sure. But I just had this conversation with a really good friend, Carmindy Bowyer who was on What Not To Wear, and we were in the same camp. We grew up the same way. She doing makeup and me doing rooms. Same pay scales, partnerships, like the blossoming and glory. It was like it's drug money. It's crazy money. It's not like designers make in a private job and get used

to it and then it's gone. But we had the foresight to always know this is temporary. How do we fall back? And she too, she'll be like "I'll go do makeup for Target or whatever for a week."

Which is great. You get to remember your roots. You don't stop going back to where you grew up. You go back. You do it. You meet all the young ones and you also see what's happening in the business. If you're at the top, you don't always get what's happening. You only see from one little vantage point. That can be very lonely. You have to go back with the troops and do it. You're always a troop. You can't forget that.

- Grace Bonney: 37:48 I think it's so funny that you said you were like a phoenix and I immediately thought "Girl, what ashes have you risen from? You are always winning."
- Genevieve G.: 37:56 Oh my god, that's funny.
- Grace Bonney: 37:58 But I realize we don't see all of the ash moments. Can you tell us what one where you felt-
- Genevieve G.: 38:02 I'll tell you five. I mean, divorce is a huge moment. Your life crumbles and everything you knew changes and you have to maintain for a child, not just yourself. A big relationship that you move into with your child, breaks and you have to figure out how do I talk about this? How do I become next? You get autoimmune diseases. Lyme disease. Hashimoto's. How am I the face of authority or knowing when I don't know about these things. You know, they expect you, if you have a powerful voice, to be that powerful with every voice and I'm so weak in other ones. I'm still figuring things out.

And then of course, the economy changes. Design television kind of goes away for a while. What do I become? But I know I'm the kind of personality that thrives with these kind of challenges and I like a little bit of risk. I'm not great with money. I don't spend crazily. I also don't invest like a wise businesswoman. I'm learning this later. I know now that I understand real estate better than pork bellies. I'm going to invest in what I know and what I do best with a brand behind me now. So why am I not doing Airbnbs? Why do I make everyone else wealthy? Why do I have to struggle when the shows go away?

So it's being, now mid-life, how to be a better businessperson. And that's something that should go in tandem with every art student in America. You should take just as many business

classes, because if you can't talk about it, you can't manage it, you won't be able to do it. And you have to rely on people to do it for you for the rest of your life and that's not good. We don't want that. So I started investing in myself in a way that I knew that only I could and that was with real estate. To create rental properties. To have appreciation. To have places for my loyal fans to go. I can't do all of their houses, but I can certainly design houses for them to go to. So that's the next chapter.

Grace Bonney: 40:12 The last one I want to ask is about kind of that waxing and waning because when I interview people, in particular women right now, in creative fields and I talk about these ups and downs and in the online community they are stark right now. They are feast and famine, feast and famine. More often famine than not. And the way that connects to our identities can be really tricky. How do you hold on to your identity and your confidence and just the pride in who you are when the industry that you are a part of can sometimes value and devalue that so quickly?

Genevieve G.: 40:44 You mean when it turns to shit, what do I do?

Grace Bonney: 40:45 Yeah.

Genevieve G.: 40:49 Great question. I think that half of it is just my innate wiring, that I always am the child and the person who's like we can figure it out. I'm wired with optimism, however much that annoys 50% of you. That helps me. Having someone who I have to provide for no matter what in a certain manner being a mother is another thing. At this point though, I know I'm good. Like I don't doubt that anymore. I'm really fucking good. And I don't think that I'm boasting or gloating. I should know that by this age, having done just one job my whole life. I better be.

So I know in the end that's not always the loudest or sexiest voice, but it is the one that will be around forever. And I know that because I've been through these cycles 10 times. Design's cool. It's not cool. It's cool. It's not cool. People can't afford houses. They can. They want to flip. They want to see construction. I've been through it. It's like fashion. And being a little older you know that. And I take calm in that.

Grace Bonney: 42:01 I want to ask you a few rapid fire questions just to close us out.

Genevieve G.: 42:03 Yeah, I love rapid fire. I'm going to fill up my water glass, so don't mind the sound effects.

Grace Bonney: 42:08 Okay. Question number one. What's the first thing you notice when you walk into a new room?

Genevieve G.: 42:14 I feel how people are living immediately. The emotion of a family and relationship. I know if there's happiness or tension, depression or new life just came in, love. I feel all of that first.

Grace Bonney: 42:28 What's your favorite smell at home?

Genevieve G.: 42:30 I like super clean with a little bit of musk. So yes I like a little patchouli. Call me hippie. I love a little palo santo. And I love a nice kind of sour current or lime candle.

Grace Bonney: 42:46 What is your favorite sound to hear at home?

Genevieve G.: 42:48 Children.

Grace Bonney: 42:50 And pay it forward. Can you let us know about someone that you think is really kind of bringing good work and community, giving back into the design world right now?

Genevieve G.: 43:00 You.

Grace Bonney: 43:01 Can't be me. Has to be somebody else.

Genevieve G.: 43:02 It's you. Rapid fire. You. Absolutely I think you're the biggest advocate for design right now and the diversification of our industry and bringing females forward. You. I would say that some of our mutual friends are also on that list. Not a coincidence. Jeanine and Bryan Hays of AphroChic. Huge advocates for the African American community and beyond. I'm so happy to call them family and happy for what they're pushing design to be. I mean, I think beyond that it is a lot of the digital pushers and I do think Netflix is part of that too. They're wanting to invite the world to the party, not just the middle of the country, not just the suburbs, but the world. And having seen now the effects of that by doing a new show and being translated into 130 different languages and having Saudi Arabia call you and say "Hey, we want to party with you." That is the ultimate community. The world. Yeah.

Grace Bonney: 44:04 Last one. What is something that you love or a passion of yours that you think people will be surprised to hear that you have?

Genevieve G.: 44:11 I'm a classically trained violinist for almost 30 years.

Grace Bonney: 44:14 I did not know that.

Genevieve G.: 44:15 Good.

Grace Bonney: 44:16 Do you still play?

Genevieve G.: 44:17 I can. I used to play for like eight hours a day kind of thing. Started when I was three.

Grace Bonney: 44:24 I so wish I had a violin under the table to just pull out and say surprise. Close us out.

Genevieve G.: 44:27 No one does. I don't know if that's like a curse or a blessing, but I'd practice a whole lot more if everyone had violins instead of pianos. But Vivaldi I can crush.

Grace Bonney: 44:37 There's a tambourine behind you.

Genevieve G.: 44:39 I'm great at tambourine. I'm really great at playing tambourine.

Grace Bonney: 44:44 I love it. Gen it's always so much fun to talk to you. Thank you so much for coming.

Genevieve G.: 44:47 You're the best interviewer period. Oprah's pretty great I've got to say. But you are awesome because your questions are thoughtful. So thank you.

Grace Bonney: 44:57 Thank you.

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