



All photographs by Maxwell Telman, portrait of Grace by Victor G Jeffreys

MEET CREATIVE PEOPLE

## GRACE & STYLE

Design\*Sponge creator Grace Bonney on creative inspiration, the future of blogging and what makes her happy. **BY STEPHANIE BOOZER**



EVEN IF you don't know her by name, chances are you've at some point drooled over Design\*Sponge creator Grace Bonney's artfully curated blog of dreamy home interiors and ingenious DIY projects. Launched in 2004 (over a break for lunch) as an outlet for Grace's musings about things she loves, Design\*Sponge has cultivated more than a cult following with hundreds of thousands of followers on Twitter and Facebook and paved the way for a best-selling book, *Design\*Sponge at Home* (Artisan, 2011). Grace is equally passionate about supporting small design businesses through Biz Ladies, an extension of the design blog that provides business advice on everything from marketing to legal matters.

"The thing I take with me after I close my laptop and read my last email is that we've helped people," says Grace from her home base in Brooklyn. "I'm proud of what we've done and proud of our small business building. That's been the most rewarding thing for me."

We recently caught up with Grace to find out more about those efforts and the woman behind the blog.



**Click:** Tell us about the beginning of Design\*Sponge.

**Grace:** The Brooklyn design scene was exploding, and I couldn't believe nobody was writing about it. I started the blog to document all of this incredible stuff I was seeing. It was a combination of being in the right place at the right time, with the right content. At the time there were only two other big design blogs: Apartment Therapy and MOCO LOCO. I had my own style though — feminine, informal and personal — and people connected with that. In the beginning, it was about creating a platform for handmade work. It's such a buzzword now, but in the early 2000s, people didn't really want handmade, like it was rough or inferior. Now it's such a popular thing, so we moved to supporting small businesses. We keep shifting and changing our goals to help our community.

**Click:** And that led to Biz Ladies?

**Grace:** In 2008, I felt a gap in the market. This was when Etsy hit big, and people were quitting their jobs to become ceramicists and artists, jumping into business with no experience. Nobody knew the basic 101 of running a business. I knew the people who had the answers, and my talent was to bring those people together. I funded a 10-city





*"People are tired of highly graphic perfection that feels computer generated. Handmade work will slowly dominate."*

tour call Biz Ladies, and brought experts on legal issues, wholesaling, PR, and marketing to free round-robin sessions. When I realized I couldn't keep funding this entirely with my own money, I turned it into a weekly column on everything from websites and social media to the emotional end of things. I've also been doing small-scale consulting with small design businesses; that's a big part of what I do. Two years ago, I started a podcast on the Heritage Radio Network called "After the Jump." So many people tell themselves their work isn't good enough, but often that's not the case; they just lack the capital or any of the million different things that can bring a business down. We help them get to the place where they can make decisions based on what's best for the business.

**Click:** What do you do when you feel stuck?

**Grace:** When I feel like nothing new and different is happening in design, I go back to the old. I'll go to flea markets, antique shows, museums, look for things old and in print — the opposite of Google images and Pinterest. That's the side effect of online. As vast as it is, people are still pulling from the same well of images. Trends definitely come in waves, and it's hard not to come out with similar looking things. If you get stuck in trends, design gets shallow really quickly. So I unplug. That grounds me.

**Click:** What does your own house look like?

**Grace:** It's actually really easy. My home is pretty simple, all black and white, except for a hot-pink sofa. My wife and I enjoy things minimal and





simple. Whatever doesn't fall into that is usually a family piece, like artwork or furniture, with a personal connection, or made by someone we know and care about.

**Click:** What's on the horizon for D\*S?

**Grace:** We're launching a line of wallpaper early next year, and we'll be doing some beauty products at the end of the year. One of my biggest passions outside of design is skin care, so we're collaborating to make a custom product. Eighty-six percent of our readers are women, so beauty is a big crossover for us. We're also working on a second book, but it's a ways off.

**Click:** Where do you see design heading? Is the chevron on its way out?

**Grace:** Rustic work, pottery and woodworking that feels more organic, where every piece is different. People are tired of highly graphic perfection that feels computer generated. Handmade work will slowly dominate.

**Click:** Everyone is a blogger, just like everyone is a photographer. What do you think this means for the value of content?

**Grace:** When Flickr happened, everyone became a professional photographer. Same with Instagram. Blogging allowed people to be writers, and everyone can have Pinterest or Tumblr and be their own curators. The wonderful thing is that it allows people with incredible voices to rise up (Tavi Gevinson-Rookie would have never happened without this) but it also means there's little accountability, no consequences for people who copy content, so it's up to the reader to decide what's worth reading. I believe in the Internet because I work there, and there are enough people to keep things working. If I didn't have that hope, I don't know how I could keep working.

**Click:** What makes you happy and balanced?

**Grace:** In addition to getting married, one of the best things I did was adopt a dog. When you are lucky enough to have a job you enjoy so much, it's all you want to do. I didn't draw the line between life and work until three years ago. Sometimes you have to shake yourself and have things in life that have nothing to do with your work. ☺

Stay connected with Grace at [designsponge.com](http://designsponge.com) and make sure to catch her weekly podcast, "After the Jump" Wednesdays at 1 p.m. EST at [heritageradiornetwork.org](http://heritageradiornetwork.org).