

“Something I feel passionately about is the magic of childhood” – Natalie Walton On Her Seachange, Slowing Down and Bringing Simplicity into Your Life

BY MARISA REMOND PUBLISHED OCT 22 2018



Founder of Imprint House, creative director, designer, writer and stylist Natalie Walton has traded her busy city life in Sydney's inner west for a calmer lifestyle in the hinterland of NSW's Central Coast with her husband and four children. "It feels like we've become a real family since the move, in part because we had our fourth child about six months after arriving here. We have become so close as we are a self-contained unit. And while there are things that I miss about the city, I don't miss living in the city itself. If anything we are considering moving even further away!"

With a career spanning all facets of style and interiors including the deputy editor role at Real Living magazine and curating content for esteemed titles including Elle Decoration and Livingetc, it's no surprise to learn that her finely honed styling skills have led to founding her own online design emporium, **Imprint House**, which not only houses unique homewares, but celebrates the art of simple living. It's an ethos that is also the focus of her beautiful book, ***This is Home: The Art of Simple Living***, which steps inside fifteen homes to capture the essence of truly meaningful spaces and how they inadvertently affect our happiness and moods. "So often we are told to gather inspiration as the first step but our needs – both physically and emotionally – should take priority. When it comes to a place that we're living in at the moment consider which areas bug you – that's our gut telling us that something isn't right that needs to be fixed." We caught up with Natalie to get insight into her inspiring approach to interiors and spaces, how she juggles motherhood with business and what simplicity means – in style and substance – to her and her family... *Image: Chris Warnes* | www.nataliewalton.com



Talk us through moving away from the city to a tree top hideaway in the beautiful Yarramalong Valley on the Central Coast - what inspired the move and how are you enjoying your new life? Do you ever miss the city?

We were living in a grand old terrace in Darlington near Redfern in Sydney and had just spent the best part of a year drawing up plans to renovate the house. Shortly after getting council approval to build we went overseas on a holiday to spend a couple of weeks in Italy and Finland. We stayed in a stone cottage near the mountains just outside of Milan as well as on an organic farm just outside Verona. We watched the children run around the properties and enjoyed feeling a million miles away from care. We also stayed in a summer cabin in Finland and soon we were talking about moving to the country. We also realised that even though we could make our home in the city more functional and create more indoor/outdoor living with the courtyard it would still only ever be the size of a postage stamp. A couple of years ago we decided to buy a cedar cabin on 26 acres in the Yarramalong Valley, which is in the hinterland of the Central Coast. We knew of the area because a good friend's parents have a weekender here and liked that we could still stay in contact with friends from Sydney yet feel that we were living more on our own terms. We have loved living here. It feels like we've become a real family since the move, in part because we had our fourth child about six months after arriving here. We have become so close as we are a self-contained unit. And while there are things that I miss about the city, I don't miss living in the city itself. If anything, we are considering moving even further away!

Tell us more about your book - *This is Home: The Art of Simple Living*...

For the past decade, I've been working in the interiors industry. For five years I worked on **Real Living** magazine as the deputy editor and when I went freelance focussed on producing and styling home features. During the course of my career I've stepped into hundreds of homes and seen thousands, and I was interested in why some places felt more like a home than others. A place can be highly designed and specified yet sometimes the homeowners aren't visible in the space at all. Whereas there are other homes that follow no "rules" yet feel warm and welcoming. I realised that the places that felt most like a home were authentic - the homeowners weren't trying to copy a look or anyone else's style. Instead, they were creating a place that met their needs - both physically and emotionally. I was interested if the idea was universal and travelled around the world with photographer **Chris Warnes** - from the US to the UK, Europe and North Africa - and the result is ***This is Home***.

How can we all focus on our values to create authentic homes full of meaning and joy? What are your tips?

The first step is to stop looking outwards and start listening to our inner voice. It may sound a little esoteric and woo-woo, and not what most decorating books advise, but I think it's essential. So often we are told to gather inspiration as the first step but our needs – both physically and emotionally – should take priority. When it comes to a place that we're living in at the moment consider which areas bug you – that's our gut telling us that something isn't right that needs to be fixed. Perhaps you keep stepping over shoes near the door or the kitchen bench top fills with clutter. Deep down we all know what is wrong so we have to get in tune with that. When it comes to fixing these areas and making decisions – which can create fatigue and stress – we need to focus on what we value. Basically, this means we need to focus on what's important to us. So let's take the example of choosing a kitchen bench top – something many people seem to struggle with. If we value natural materials and places with a sense of history we might select timber or marble. And if we have to choose between them, we might value spending money on a family holiday than an expensive bench top – so choose timber. Or vice versa. We might decide that a holiday this year can wait and we would rather a bench top to last for the next 20 years. There is no right or wrong answer, but it helps when we tune in with what's important in our lives.

You stepped inside more than fifteen homes in the book - what were some of your most memorable and why?

Honestly, each and every one was amazing. When I look at every image in the book I am instantly transported back to the day that I stepped inside the home and met all these amazing people, and was allowed into their world. However, there were some conversations that have really stayed with me. One was with Pierre Emmanuel Martin from **Maison Hand**. He told me that many customers ask to visit his home when they are interested in using his design services. Often they ask him to recreate the look at their place. However, in his beautiful French accent, he said, it's not possible. He can help guide their choices but they have to choose pieces that have meaning for them. Because when he looks at a particular artwork on his wall he is reminded that it was the first piece of art that he bought and he remembers saving for it, and for that reason, it holds a special meaning. You cannot recreate these connections. We have to be true to our story and journey.





We're all bombarded with so much stuff - how do you approach minimalism with kids?

I've always tried to contain the amount of "stuff" that enters our home. I remember being exhausted by all the kids gadgets and paraphernalia that was available while I was working at **Real Living** magazine. But with each successive child, we have actually reduced the amount of "stuff" in our home because I donate what doesn't get used and have stopped accepting gifts at birthday parties. We ask for handmade cards instead of presents - which are beautiful meaningful keepsakes. And as our children are also a little older they run and play outside rather than needing toys, which I find kids tire of quickly anyway. The more children we have, the less we need!

Tell us about your homewares store Imprint House...

As we were packing up our home in the city I had a major cull and realised that the pieces that I wanted to hold onto were invariably neutral and made of natural materials. However, there wasn't a single destination for beautiful everyday essentials. I would spend hours searching for a good-looking dustpan and brush and beautiful linen tea towels and timber peg hooks. So I decided to create an online emporium where you could buy useful and beautiful homewares in one place.

You don't have a TV screen - what do you do when you need to calm the kids down and get them to sit still. What activities do you do to slow things down?

When my eldest son was younger, we used to let him watch ABC for kids for about an hour when he stopped napping during the middle of the day and was getting restless. However, I started to notice that it was affecting his behaviour afterwards and as I did more research about screen time and the effect it has on the development of a child's brain we made a conscious decision to phase it out. To be honest, I think the transition was hardest for us than for him. He has always found ways to entertain himself. My children love drawing, and if they are getting restless now I tell them to go and play outside. As there are four children they always have someone to play with, and I think that helps. I realise not everyone is in this situation, and you have to do what's right for you at the time. Also, nothing is forever - or at least it doesn't have to be. But I do think it's important to ask ourselves the why behind the why. When it comes to screen time, who really benefits - is it the child or the parent? And if we are doing it for us, given the cognitive issues that are related to screen time, is there some other way? Perhaps setting up a drawing area, a sandpit or mud kitchen outside (which my kids play with for hours) or some other activity that can still provide a break for the parent while being of benefit to a child's development. Something I feel passionately about is the magic of childhood. There is only a short window of time when children have that beautiful innocence about the world. Once it's gone, it's gone. With my own children, I don't want to hurry that process. There is plenty of time to be an adult - most of our lives - but there's only a short window to be a child and I want them to enjoy it for as long as possible.





What kind of changes did you make to your new home?

Most of the changes have been cosmetic, mainly neutralising the colour scheme. The fireplace was magenta and walls in the upstairs bedrooms were lime green, iridescent blue and aubergine. Basically we painted everything that had been a colour, white. It feels so much calm and relaxing as a result. Plus, because we have a whole bank of windows upstairs and downstairs we don't need colour inside – we just need to look outside the window. We also remodelled the kitchen. It had a glass splash back, Caesarstone bench top and stainless steel handles. It didn't feel in keeping with the rest of the house so we replaced the glass with timber panelling, the engineered stone with timber and the stainless steel with aged brass. We also painted the cupboards in Dulux Western Myall, which feels more in keeping with the slate floor.

What objects/things in your home do you adore and why?

One of my favourite pieces is the timber lockers in the living room. They have such character and are a beautiful texture and colour. I found them at a vintage store on a walk through Chippendale near my old house one day. They had sourced them in France and they used to be in a horses' stable storing feed. They're great for storage too. I love pieces with a history and that are multifunctional.

How do you start your day - what's a typical morning like in your household?

At the moment our two-year-old starts our day! We all have breakfast together and my husband does the school run. Once everyone has left I do a little bit of yoga and meditate. It's my favourite way to start the day.

You're a mother to four - how do you manage your workload with being a mother?

The simple and honest answer is my husband, Daniel. He sold his manufacturing business before we left Sydney and now we are both focussed on Imprint House, and he supports me while I work. He does the school run and makes dinners. When the kids get home, I turn off the computer and focus on family life. That might mean folding the washing, but I do what I can that doesn't involve "working".

How do you get through four bedtime routines at night - do you all read books together? What time do your kids go to bed? What does a night at your place look like?

Bedtime books are non-negotiable in our house. The two things we are most consistent on is eating breakfast and dinner together as a family, and reading books to each child. At the moment, I read to my two-year-old at about 7:00 pm and put him to bed. Then I read to my five-year-old and put her to bed at about 7.30 pm. My husband reads to our seven-year-old, who goes to bed at about 8:00 pm and our ten-year-old goes to bed at about 9:30 pm – he's always been a night owl and enjoys the quiet time in the evening to work on projects. Currently, he's brewing ginger beer! Sometimes we switch it up, but this is our routine at the moment.

What does simple living mean to you and how can we embrace it?

For me, simple living is focussing on what I value – my family and living my best life. It is so easy to get distracted on other ideas of living. I think it's essential to take time out and let our own ideas form. Whether that's meditation, walking, having boundaries or time out from social media. We live in a hyper connected world, and while there are many benefits I think it's never been more important to be mindful of how we live.

How do you unwind?

On a daily basis, I try to meditate and/or do yoga every day. And when I have time, I walk – I've always loved to do this. I never wear headphones – I only take my thoughts.





What makes you feel stressed?

I rarely get stressed these days. I don't know if it's because of meditation or just a process of getting older and being less focussed on an outcome or worrying about people's perception of me. However, for a long time when we first moved here I worried about money. That's because as parents we have made a decision not to work long hours so we can spend more time together as a family while our children are young. It's meant we've had to live lean to make this happen, but I wouldn't trade that for the world.

Do you meditate - if so, when do you fit it in?

I try to meditate during the week after the kids go to school. I know it's not when I first wake up, or every day, but it works for me and I believe something is better than nothing.

Last book you read?

I recently finished ***Strength in Stillness: The Power of Transcendental Meditation*** by Bob Roth and I'm currently reading ***Creative Discipline, Connected Family*** by Lou-Harvey Zahra - I'd highly recommend both. And I wish I had the parenting book at the start of my journey. It is filled with so many lessons that it's taken me ten years to learn.

Do you listen to podcasts - if so, which ones?

Yes, I've recently listened to the entire series of podcasts by Sara Tasker - **Hashtag Authentic**. They are great for anyone who is growing a creative business. I've always enjoyed driving - but now I can't wait to get back in the car to listen to more.