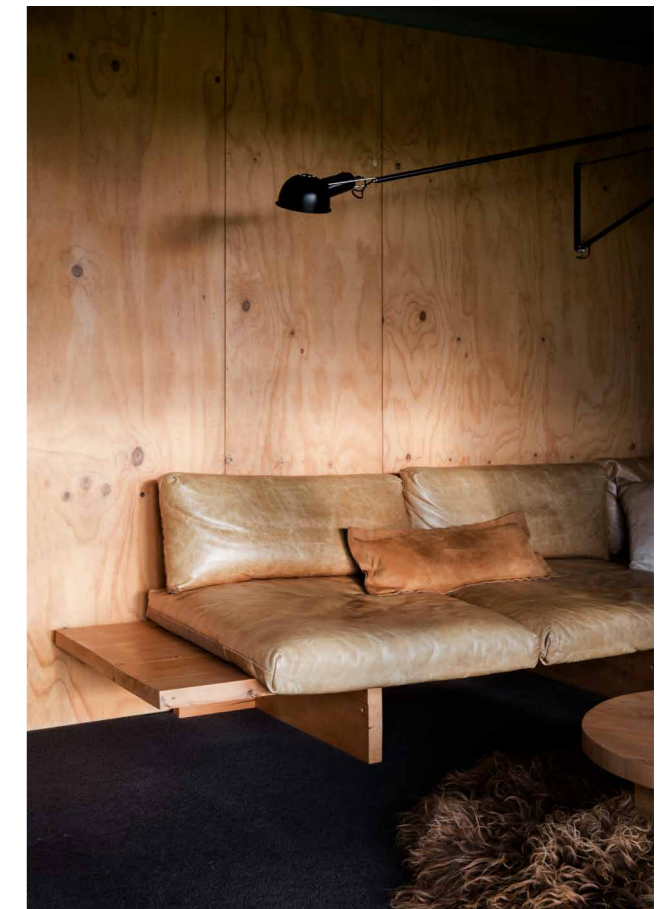


Slow thinking

Thoughtful, responsible... the principles of the slow movement read a lot like our manifesto. In her new book, Natalie Walton takes a stepwise approach.



CREATE A VISION

We can live more responsibly at home when we consider that our decisions have an impact not just on the world today but on the form it will take tomorrow. If we have choice, we also have power, and this position of privilege is something we should acknowledge and respect. It can inform the vision of the world we want to create and the journey that's needed to make it possible.

So let's consider our legacy. What mark do we want to leave on the world? How do we want to be remembered? What gift do we have to give? To this end, we can consider the Japanese concept of *ikigai* — a reason for being — which relates to what we consider to be of value in our lives and what gives them meaning. Interestingly, the word 'ikigai' has its origins on the Japanese island of Okinawa, which is said to have the largest population of centenarians in the world. In many ways, they embody the principles of slow living: they stay active but in a gentle way, eat well but aren't gluttonous, connect to those around them but also spend time alone in nature, and live in the moment.

Let's consider the contribution we want to make. What do we want our legacy to be? When it comes to our homes, can we create them in a way that makes a positive contribution — with buildings and spaces that others will want to maintain or preserve, for example? Can we embrace choices that will withstand trends or at least won't deplete the world's resources irreparably? Our vision is our guide and compass to living in a way that's more aligned with our values.

DEVELOP A VALUE FRAMEWORK

When we gravitate towards making changes in our lives, we do so in the hope they'll be better, but how do we know what path to take? We all want to make the right decisions and can find our way when we establish the same framework for our lives as the homes we're creating. First, we envisage the big picture, then we lay the foundations and build the framework to make improvements step by step.

When it comes to our lives, once we've created a vision, we should consider what we stand for — our personal value system — and let this become the framework that guides our decision-making. So what do we value? What's most important? For many of us, it might be family or the future, but it could also be nature or community; we can value more than one element, although sometimes we have to prioritise one over another.

We can feel empowered about making positive changes by cross-checking against our list of values when making decisions about where we live, the size of our home, the materials we use and the items we furnish it with. When narrowing down our choices, we can check to see if we're honouring the elements of our lives that we say are important. For example, when choosing flooring, we can prioritise a more sustainable choice by using recycled floorboards or ones certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). We can also choose to live plastic- or waste-free. When we create using our values as a guide, our homes can become more meaningful. >

ABOVE This cabin at Ross Farm in Gippsland, southeastern Australia, has been given a new lease on life with simple, well-considered updates. Many of the pieces were handmade by its interior architect owner Andrea Moore and her dad Lindsay, including this dining table and sofa. **OPPOSITE** Stylist Romi Weinberg's Sydney home is decorated with a classic neutral colour palette and lots of rustic pre-loved pieces.



FIND YOUR WHY

Even when we have a clear understanding of what we value, it's easy to become overwhelmed by the options, ideas and information on offer. We can also become distracted by the flood of details about other people's lives. Little wonder we can experience decision fatigue on everything from where to live, how much to spend on a home and whether to extend or work within a building's footprint, to the materials to choose for a benchtop or the floor.

If we take a moment to understand the motivations behind our choices, we're more likely to make the right ones. We can do this easily when we ask 'why' in relation to any question as a way to discover our intention or true sense of purpose. Having a clear understanding of our 'why' on any decision also allows us to start trusting our gut instinct, which research shows helps us make better decisions.

What's right for someone else isn't necessarily right for our situation. So although it can be easy to know what we want to do, as well as how and when we want to do it, we should also understand why we want to go down a particular path. 'Why?' is a question that should be asked in relation to some of the biggest and smallest decisions of our daily lives, and before we buy. Why am I really doing this? If you say you want to care more for the environment, dig deeper before you make a purchase, even a sustainable one — you may just discover an unexpected intention. To get a deeper understanding of our intentions, we can ask 'Why?' five times. Often, we're

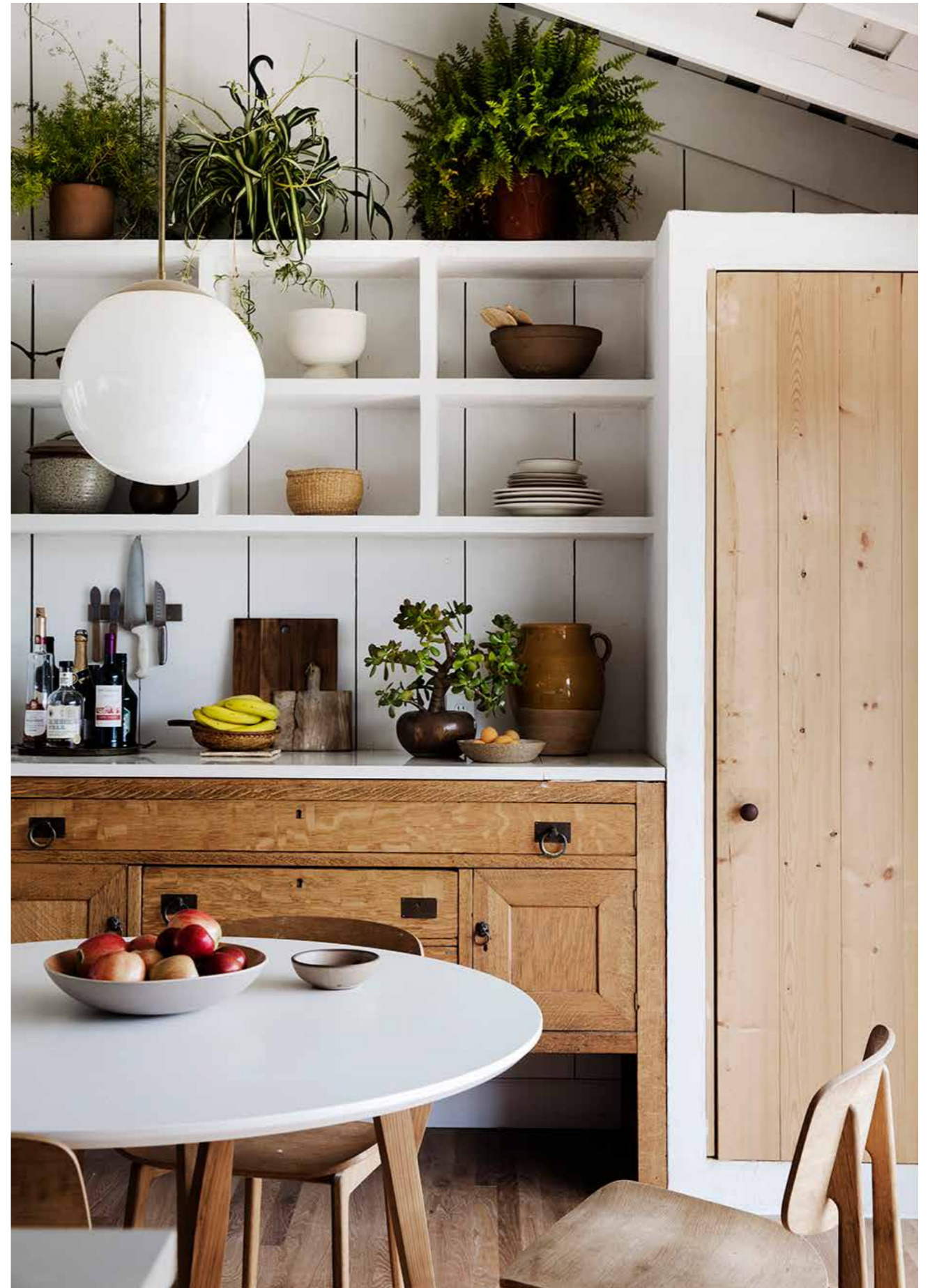


trying to meet a desire, not a need. When we have a clear idea of our why, decision-making is easier, as is staying the course.

FOCUS ON PRIORITIES

Once we have a solid understanding of our values and purpose, we can set boundaries around our lifestyle. There's often a great disparity between the life we want to live and how we spend our days. Our attention and self-control are under siege from the moment we wake until just before we go to sleep. Ask anyone what matters most to them and the answer is easy. However, if we look at how we spend our time, our days are filled with contradictions. The data is clear — we're addicted to our devices, even if we sometimes struggle to admit it. How much time do we spend completely engaged with our family on a daily basis? And are we really prioritising the planet with the things we buy on a regular basis, even the sustainable or ethical ones?

Our homes are ideally placed to create boundaries. Devices can be left at the front door, and mealtimes and gatherings reserved for real-life connection. Bedrooms can also be preserved as sanctuaries from technology. Let's care more about what we value and less about what's not worth our time or money. Let's give careful thought to when to say yes and when to say no. The more we set boundaries around what matters most in our lives and live intentionally, the more we can live in alignment with our priorities. >



ABOVE LEFT The material palette of The Barn at Ross Farm, which has been reimagined as a wedding venue, was inspired by the surrounding landscape, with much of it sourced from the area too. **ABOVE RIGHT** This Edinburgh kitchen by deVOL is made primarily from sustainable beech timber. **OPPOSITE** A second-hand sideboard was built into this kitchen in San Clemente, California.



TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Let's consider who benefits most from many of our daily decisions. Global corporations with billion-dollar profits know the answer. It's good to question if what we desire is a need or a want before we make any purchase. We can also build a pause into our decision-making process. Do we need to move house or build a bigger one? Do we need to make structural or cosmetic changes, and if we do, can we make them more responsibly? Is there a more sustainable choice? Can we wait? Are we opting for timeless choices that will withstand trends?

Throughout the world, previous generations built structures, furniture and much more in a slow and considered way. These buildings and objects have lasted hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. Given all we have access to, is this not still possible? We also have the ability to choose our response — from what we believe to how we behave — and take responsibility for the energy we bring to spaces or situations, too. Cultivate self-awareness. Pay attention, be proactive and do the work. Small steps lead to consistent results. Good habits yield good outcomes. ♣

ABOVE New York's Tanya Jonsson has been a collector of art, sculpture and furniture for more than 20 years. Most of the intriguing finds in her home have come from estate sales.

10 ways to make positive changes for the planet

1 Consume less. Buy goods that come with warranties and have parts that can be replaced. Borrow if you need to use something only once or occasionally. Repair or repurpose what you already own.

2 Buy second-hand. Consider vintage and antique stores, estate and garage sales, salvage yards, fleamarkets, online marketplaces, charity shops and roadside finds.

3 Shop local. You'll support smaller businesses, save on food miles, reduce your carbon footprint and foster a sense of community.

4 Reduce waste. Purchase goods with less packaging and ask shop owners about their supply chain. Buy in bulk, filling your own containers. Reuse spray bottles and glass jars. Use cloths instead of paper towels, napkins instead of serviettes, metal straws instead of paper or plastic. Recycle, including soft plastic. Compost food scraps or feed them to the chickens.

5 Embrace veges. Eating less meat and dairy is the biggest and simplest way to reduce our environmental impact on the planet.

6 Be energy-efficient. Use the power-save mode on computers and other electronic equipment. Turn off and unplug lights, electronic devices and appliances when not in use. Opt for energy-efficient appliances and lightbulbs. Select your washing machine's cold-water cycles to reduce energy consumption, and line-dry your clothes when you can.

7 Use renewable energy. Find out if your energy provider uses renewable energy sources. Install solar panels if possible. Check if your superannuation fund makes ethical and sustainable investments.

8 Think water smart. Install a more efficient shower head and a dual-flush toilet; take shorter showers and flush less often. Capture rainwater in a tank. Only wash clothes when necessary and divert grey water to the garden. Place bowls in the kitchen sink and under leaking taps to catch water for your vegetable garden.

9 Plant trees. Grow a native, succulent or drought-tolerant garden.

10 Enjoy slow travel. Reduce your carbon emissions on journeys to and from home by walking, cycling, carpooling, taking public transport or using electric or hybrid vehicles. Simple steps can make significant change.



Edited excerpt from Still: The Slow Home by Natalie Walton (Hardie Grant, \$65).