

By Anna Mitchael



Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas

Q Dear Boots,
For Christmas, my neighbor gave me one of the ugliest lamps I've ever seen. To make things worse, she said she "spent way too much on it" and "can't wait to see it in the living room." If it were any other friend, I'd skip inviting her over for a few months and then hope she forgot, but my neighbor pops in at least every other day! Should I put the lamp on display or stay true to my heart (and my decor) and find the perfect place for it in the closet??

— From, Lamp Gal

A Dear Lamp Gal,
A good, solid case of the

stomach flu is probably where you should start. When people hear that your family is being taken down by one of those gastrointestinal viruses that, as you are clutching the toilet, you think is deserved only by the Third Reich, or maybe telemarketers who prey on old people, they stay away. A persistent neighbor, like the one you are dealing with, might insist on a kindness, such as making a pot of soup, but for any determined isolator, that's child's play. Just tell her to leave it on the front walk and not come a step closer, lest she be struck by *der Durchfall*.

That should get you to mid-January, at which point you could spend a couple weeks just claiming the blues. Super common for January and understandable you wouldn't want people "popping in" when you are down and out.

Other suggestions for keeping

away this person who likes you so much she spends more than she should on meaningful gifts she hopes you will love: Get one of those anti-welcome mats that actually says, "Go away." Start a smear campaign on your neighborhood app that she's been watering her lawn on the wrong day. Or last but not least, have one of your kids put a banana in the tailpipe of her car, and when she calls to tell you what happened, say something like, "My Johnny? But he's on the honor roll and volunteers at church. He would *never* do such a thing."

Once you've thoroughly derailed that friendship, your lamp-free living room decor should be safe. Of course, now that no one is swinging by to chat, the afternoon hours could get a bit long.

But since you're so deeply invested in house design, maybe

that extra time would be well spent with magazines featuring homes curated by people with your same interests. In the magazine industry, periodicals that focus solely on home design are called “shelter” magazines. A bit amusing since “shelter” is something people *need*, and there’s very little in these magazines that a person *must have* to get through life. But we aren’t here for moralizing, are we, Lamp Gal? Absolutely not! This is a journey for design that is unsullied by ugliness and (as you said) true to the heart. *Das herz!*

In that stack of magazines you should find house after house where someone (and usually a team of well-paid someones, though that detail often gets buried in the fine print) made relentless decisions so the home can get to the gold medal podium of publication. Note how they have stopped using deodorant and shampoo — as no bathroom belies any hint of product. There are none of the messes that show a kitchen that’s an actual heart of the home — bowls with nothing but a few final popcorn kernels left, or a couple slivers of orange peel that missed the trash. In the bedrooms there are no rumpled sheets or piles of laundry that scream: Humans live here. These are the kinds of sacrifices one must be ready to make if the house is going to make the gold medal podium of publication.

You came here to ask me a question, Lamp Gal, but I think it’s of utmost importance that I turn the tables and ask a question of you: Are you really interested in giving up deodorant and messes, furniture your grandma handed down to you, and gifts from people who care? The decision is up to you. Either the stack of magazines

or the lamp will have to go in the closet. If you are *really* staying true to your heart, I suspect it will lead you to your answer. *Es werde licht!*

— *Love, Boots*

Q Dear Boots, After the holidays life always seems so *blah*. Do you have any tips to beat the January blues?

— From, Debbie (*Don't Want to Get) Downer*

A Dear Debbie (*Don't Want to Get) Downer*, Either you're a mind reader, because I was just talking about the January blues, or you are my iPhone, eavesdropping on me yet again. Unfortunately, I don't have any tried and true, guaranteed cures, but I can pass on the advice given by our great-grandparents to the younger generations, back before people believed in coddling the ones they loved: *Get lost*.

Yes, that's right. Get in your car and get lost. You don't have to leave the county or even the city limits. Just get in your car or take off on foot to see if you can uncover something that surprises you.

Maybe a new food truck has popped up. Or if you are really lucky, you might spot a flower that has managed to push through the frost. As every generation — curmudgeons and coddlers alike — have learned, we can't leave our problems behind forever, but a little distance can give new perspective.

Even without the glow of holiday lights, it is still possible to find a spark.

— *Love, Boots*
