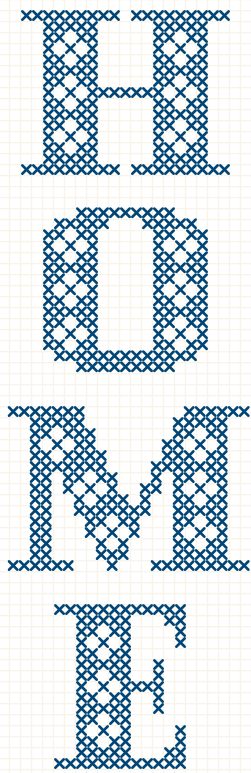


# The COMFORTS of



If we've learned anything this year, it's that the best homes are designed for how we *live*, not just how they look. Consider this a love letter to the often-unsung features of our favorite spaces. You may just see your home through a whole new lens.



illustrations by **MELINDA JOSIE**



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROGER DAVIES/OTTO  
STYLING BY JESSICA TAYLOR/OTTO

HOME IS...

## THE CRUNCH OF A GRAVEL DRIVE

Every house has its own hums and rhythms, whether it's the thwack of a screen door, the creak of a hardwood floor, or the calming whir of a ceiling fan. But nothing rivals the languid crunch of a car slowly pulling up a winding gravel drive—a happy cue that friends and family have arrived.





HOME IS...  
**A WALK DOWN  
MEMORY LANE**

Here's a weird thing about design magazines: You rarely see family photos on display. But a home's not a home without them. Whether hung clustered on the wall (such as in this nook designed by interior designer Rita König and architect Gil Schafer), staggered up the stairs, or arranged on bookcases and tables, family photos provide a visual reminder of how quickly time passes while drawing the blessings of the present into focus. On hard days, they reassure us that, like a bad bowl cut or braces, this too shall pass. On bright days, there's nothing like a retro laser-light background to inch your smile wider.



HOME IS...  
**Dance parties in  
the kitchen**

"One of my gifts from the quarantine (yep, I said that) has been having our family together in our house. Most mornings, my husband will make breakfast for us before he begins work. I normally walk into the kitchen to find music blasting over the speakers—gospel, Broadway, children's songs, inspirational songs. Sometimes there's even a dance party going on. Breakfast and music is the way we start the day, the way we wake up the house and wake up our hearts."

—Heather Headley, star of *Sweet Magnolias* on Netflix

HOME IS...A WANDERER'S TRUE NORTH

**D**espite what you might believe, no one appreciates home more than a wanderer. Although we have a very real love affair with the road (and have built a brand around the concept), there's nothing we love more than coming home. For us, that home is in Round Top, Texas (population: 90). Home is family. Home is roots. Home is gratitude. While the road offers its own sort of romance, home is a place where all your adventures come together like stars spinning in the cosmos, forming one pristine constellation: the constellation of your life. Our deep roots and deep love of family connect us to home in a fierce and fiery way. You know that feeling you get when you put on your favorite pair of old, beat-up blue jeans? The ones that are threadbare and faded. That's how home should feel. It should be your cozy, come-back-to place."

—Amie Sikes and Jolie Sikes-Smith, *the Junk Gypsies*



MAIN IMAGE, ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO; PORTRAIT COURTESY OF HEATHER HEADLEY.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO.



HOME IS...  
**A DOG THAT  
EAGERLY AWAITS  
YOUR RETURN**

It's been a hard year for humanity, but a very good one for dogs. With work-from-home as the new normal, our loyal companions have spent more time by our sides than ever. Even so, any time you step outside to retrieve the paper or take out the trash, chances are your four-legged family member (like this good boy in a home designed by Gil Schafer) is enthusiastically waiting to greet you as if you've just returned from a long stint overseas.





HOME IS...  
**A MUDROOM  
FULL OF STUFF**

The delightfully disheveled clubhouse for your motliest things, the mudroom is the perfectly imperfect place at home where paw prints can go uncleared and the clutter of wet umbrellas, snowy coats, and discarded backpacks is not only fine, it's expected. As the first room you enter—through a back or side door, most likely—it's also a much-needed space to shake off the day's mental muck.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANNIE SCHLECHTER; STYLING BY CAROLYN ENGLEFIELD;  
DESIGNER: LYNNE STAIR; ARCHITECT: CYNTHIA FILKOFF

PHOTOGRAPH BY JULIE SOEFER. FROM THE BEAUTY OF HOME BY MARIE FLANIGAN (GIBBS SMITH, 2020).



HOME IS...  
**A MORNING  
CALM BEFORE  
THE SWARM**

There are few moments filled with more possibility than the quiet minutes in the morning before a house wakes up, when thoughts can be savored alongside the first cup of coffee—preferably in a quaint nook (like this one by designer Marie Flanigan). Soon the bedheaded breakfast eaters will descend and this calm, cozy spot will become the hardest-working corner of the house, transformed by spills, devices, and, okay, ruckuses. In a matter of hours it will be where homework gets done, games get played, bills get paid, and dinner gets served. But not yet. It's still early, and there's time to reset and prepare. To take a breath, to feel gratitude for the coming chaos.

HOME IS...

*"The paper hearts my husband, Ben, strung up on Valentine's Day that I may never take down; the pink spot on the linen sofa where my daughter Helen's marker missed the page; the smell of bacon cooking in cast iron. That's the best stuff there is."*

—ERIN NAPIER, STAR OF  
HGTV'S HOME TOWN

HOME IS...PEN MARKS ON THE WALL WITH SCRIBBLED NAMES AND DATES

I was 15 at a friend's house when I first saw one. Her mom had markings, in an assortment of colors, of every child from birth to full height with all the dates, some with hearts and smiley faces. As I started flipping houses in my late 20s, whenever I would come upon these markings, realtors would apologize and say things like 'you can paint over that!' and I would assure them that not only would I avoid painting over it, but I would love to find the family and cut out the piece of wood. I think this touch point of a warm, welcoming home gives children a sense of foundation, and the more they feel like they have a place to call home, the better chance they will turn out as kind, compassionate humans!"

—Singer-songwriter Holly Williams







HOME IS...

## A KITCHEN THAT WEARS ITS AGE

"A well-designed kitchen is like a good cast-iron skillet: well seasoned," says James Farmer, designer and author of *Arriving Home*, who applied that thinking to this Georgia space. "Just like a skillet gets better with use, with years of fried chicken, biscuits, and peach cobbler, a kitchen needs layers that add flavor." That "seasoning" comes courtesy of memories and gatherings, but also through a mix of materials that get better with age and use—marble, butcher block, brass, and even wool rugs—that hint at where hands touched, knives chopped, family gathered, and dogs napped.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HERR. FROM ARRIVING HOME BY JAMES FARMER (GIBBS SMITH, 2020).

HUTCH AND CHINA, LESLIE BROWN, FROM HOME STORIES: DESIGN IDEAS FOR MAKING A HOUSE A HOME BY KIM LEGGETT (VABRAMS BOOKS, FALL 2020).

HOME IS...

## Where you use the "good" china

"It was lunch at the F. W. Woolworth Co.'s diner on our occasional Saturday shopping trips that spawned my interest in collecting restaurant ware. I always looked forward to those outings, as it was the only time my family ever dined in a restaurant. Momma cooked all the family meals at home, so sliding into a booth and ordering a 'very special' hamburger from a printed menu was a huge treat for this small-town girl. My meal always arrived on a thick white plate banded in green

and bearing the cursive script of the Woolworth's logo. To me, those were the most beautiful plates—not only how they looked, but also the noise they made as they clinked against each other in the busy diner. I once wrote in my childhood diary that my dream was to own the F. W. Woolworth Co.'s plates. Looking back, it was more about the experience, and the plates connected me to it. Throughout my picking journeys, I've never found the exact Woolworth's restaurant ware I dreamed about, but on a fall day in Georgia at the *Country Living* Fair, I fell in love with a similar collection. Here was everything needed to serve a feast to a family of 12, restaurant-style! The collection of bowls, plates, and platters came with the logo of the Green Ridge Turkey Farm restaurant, featuring an image of a hefty, boastful turkey that I'm sure will grace our family's table for generations to come."

—Kim Leggett, owner of City Farmhouse and author of *Home Stories*

HOME IS...

*"That place of warmth that always welcomes you back and centers all your thoughts to what's really important in life."*

—FASHION DESIGNER BILLY REID





#### HOME IS... A SPOT TO SOAK

There's a reason the claw-foot tub is a design hallmark of a country house. Despite its humble origins (the earliest were enamel-covered horse troughs!), the claw-foot tub now represents the ultimate act of self-care, literally elevating bath time and all its indulgences. No matter your amenities—suds or salts, paperbacks or podcasts—the stillness of the water sets a decidedly unhurried tone. They say great ideas come in the shower, but we suspect the best ones bubble up in the bath, like this dreamy setting by designer Sean Scherer.

#### HOME IS...

*"The clanking sound an old radiator makes when the heat turns on, and you're still snuggled up in bed."*

—ELIZABETH FINKELSTEIN, FOUNDER OF CIRCA OLD HOUSES AND CL COLUMNIST



#### HOME IS... Curated clutter

"Whether I'm in the country or city, my comfort zone is my desk. In the city [top], it's a sturdy country table shoved between a stuffed bookshelf and a tall primitive cupboard that provides ample storage for all kinds of reference materials—except for the stacks of books piled under the table that my knees are constantly toppling over! The comfort of that table is supplied by the world of personal objects that surround and fortify me as I type away on my laptop. Nothing gives me more pleasure than sitting in my yellow chair parked in front of my curated clutter staring at a title from one of my books that sums up what could one day be etched on my tombstone: 'Once Upon a Time, There Was a Girl Who Loved Too Many Things.' My desk in the country [bottom] is a diminutive green-and-yellow slant-front desk almost too tiny to really work from, measuring only 30 inches across, but still, it is a tiny universe of things I love. When I sit there, I am comforted by the images of family, favorite volumes of poetry, and a straw tray painted with a portrait of a parakeet that reminds me of Ernie, my childhood pet. Oh, how happy I am, surrounded by each of these things that provoke memories of the people and experiences that I carry in my heart."

—Mary Randolph Carter, author, collector, and CL columnist

BATHROOM, WILLIAM ABRANOWICZ; FROM SEAN SCHERER'S KABBINETT & KAMMER BY SEAN SCHERER; DESKS, CARTER BERG. (OPPOSITE PAGE) HOME OF FASHION DESIGNER JOHNSON HARTIG.



#### HOME IS... A GALLERY FOR EMERGING ARTISTS

Pride is the look on a kid's face when you place a piece of their artwork front-and-center on the fridge, which serves as a gallery of rotating exhibits in so many of our homes. Creations in marker, crayon, glitter, and glue add uplifting pops of color to even the sleekest kitchens. Mix in photos, personal notes, and souvenir magnets, and you've got a mixed-media masterpiece.



HOME IS...

*"Good vibes. It's filled with colorful art, pillows, plants, and the people I love, and it's where I feel most creative."*

—JUSTINA BLAKENEY,  
FOUNDER & DIRECTOR OF JUNGALOW



PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC PIASECKI. FROM KATIE RIDDER: MORE ROOMS BY KATIE RIDDER. COPYRIGHT 2020. USED WITH PERMISSION FROM VANDOME

HOME IS...

**COLLECTIONS  
WITH CHARACTER**

When it comes to decorating our homes, there's a real desire to be "finished"—to tie up the loose ends and be done with it. But if our spaces are truly a reflection of ourselves, they should, like us, evolve over time, with additions that reflect new interests and pieces that come with new stories. ("Well, this one time in Round Top...") In grammatical terms, home is an ellipsis, not a period. Perhaps no one understands that dot-dot-dot approach to decorating like a collector, who trades box-store convenience for curation over time. While psychological research says that people gain more happiness from experiences than possessions, when possessions are tied to experiences, it's the best of both worlds. (Design by Katie Ridder, author of *Katie Ridder: More Rooms*.)





### HOME IS... A KICK OF KITSCH

"The entrance hall greets my guests when they arrive. It's quite a somber room, hung with inherited portraits and antique furniture. I've mixed in some modern pieces to lift it, filled the center table with flowers, and light a huge fire when friends arrive. However, the thing that really transformed it was one Christmas, for fun, I pinned a red paper party hat on the balding man in the large portrait over the table. It's stayed there ever since and always brings a smile to people's faces when they walk in."

—Cath Kidston, designer and author of *A Place Called Home*



### HOME IS... Where you watch the world go by

"If you walk into our Brooklyn apartment on any given day, I can tell you where to find us: curled up on the window seat. This cozy spot—with throw pillows, a blanket, the odd stuffed animal—is perfect for reading and daydreaming. My older son naps there like a kitten, and my younger son likes gazing out the window and seeing the world go by (especially garbage trucks; be still his heart!). In the winter, you can watch the snow falling; on summer evenings, you can spot fireflies. I can see how quickly my boys are growing by how far their feet stretch across the seat. I feel lucky to have this magical nook. If we ever move, it'll be the spot I miss most."

—Joanna Goddard, founder of women's lifestyle website *A Cup of Jo*



### HOME IS...A CHRISTMAS TREE IN OCTOBER

We love the holidays, so when we moved in together, we began a tradition of putting our tree up on October 1. First, we decorate it for Halloween with spiderwebs, ghosts, tombstones, and the like. Then we turn it into a festive, autumnal tree. Right after Thanksgiving, it gets its final makeover for Christmas. (Because we're movie buffs, one year, it was *Gremlins*-themed!) This may all be unconventional, but so are we! And this way we get to enjoy a holiday tree for three full months."

—Lydia Hearst, model and actress, and Chris Hardwick, comedian and host

ENTRANCE HALL, CHRISTOPHER SIMON SYKES, FROM A PLACE CALLED HOME BY CATH KIDSTON (PAVILION, 2020), WINDOW SEAT, ALPHA SMOOT.



### HOME IS... "DAD'S CHAIR"

What is it about dads and their chairs? Chances are, your ol' man has one, and while it's not—*ahem*—always the most stylish seat in the house (think that college-era leather behemoth), he'll bet you the remote that it's the most comfortable. However many times Mom redecorates, per Dad, "the whole dang room," the chair is non-negotiable. (And here's a secret: She wouldn't change it, either.)

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HERR, FROM ARRIVING HOME BY JAMES FARMER (GIBBS SMITH, 2020).



HOME IS...

## A PLACE TO GATHER OFF THE GRID

In a world with endless distractions, doing nothing—what experts describe as “waking rest”—is a dying art, so we have a newfound appreciation for the sitting room: a device-free living space (like this cozy den by architect Gil Schafer) where the only screen surrounds the fireplace and even the clock is analog. Books and board games are still allowed—encouraged, even.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC PIASECKI/OTTO.



## HOME IS... A BLANKET FORT IN THE LIVING ROOM

If there was ever a year to hunker down, this is it, which is likely why the humble fort has reached peak popularity. (Fun fact: Earlier this year, Ikea even released six very Ikea-esque fort-assembly diagrams targeted at budding builders.) There’s surely something psychological going on here—a child’s heightened need for security in a changing world, a desire for more personal space, a grab for a parent’s attention (“Get the good pillows off the floor!”)—which is why, in the name of investigative reporting, we infiltrated\* a real-life construction site, sheet corners precariously held up with painter’s tape, for the straight-from-the-source scoop. Inside, we found Jack, age 6, who shined a flashlight in our faces, shrugged his shoulders, and said, “They’re just fun.” \*Please send Advil.

## HOME IS...

*“Our personal charging port—  
and where the dents in the cushions  
custom match our butts.”*

—JOSH KILMER-PURCELL AND DR. BRENT RIDGE,  
FOUNDERS OF BEEKMAN 1802





HOME IS...  
**A BEDSIDE  
TABLE THAT'S  
UNIQUELY YOU**

As far as furnishings go, the small-but-mighty nightstand is among the most personal pieces in our homes. Part treasure chest, part library, part junk drawer, the tiny table is a pint-size picture of who we are—the tea drinker, the historical-fiction devotee, the “messy half” of a marital duo. One of the first things we see every morning and the last thing we touch before turning out the light, it’s a steady sidekick in topsy-turvy times.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON/OTTO; DESIGNER: RODMAN PRIMACK OF RDM DESIGN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEANNA DIKEMAN.



HOME IS...  
**Parents waving  
goodbye at the  
end of the drive**

It's a sight that's familiar to many of us: parents bidding a bittersweet farewell from the end of a driveway. For 27 years, Missouri-based photographer Deanna Dikeman took photographs of her parents as they did just that from their home in Sioux City, Iowa. What began as a simple snapshot in 1991—a way to soften the blow of saying goodbye—ultimately turned into a ritual and, later, a moving photo exhibition titled *Leaving and Waving*, a tribute to a simple gesture of love and how it looks over time. The background changes throughout the years (a red ranch house, an assisted-living facility) and Deanna's father, who passed away in 2009, falls absent from the frame, but the swaps in scenery only reinforce the collective takeaway that “home” is people, not a place. While we can't claim to know what Heaven will be like, we hope its streets are more gravel than gold and that when we pull up in the drive, it feels a bit like this series in reverse: Familiar faces slowly coming back into focus, smiling and waving, and so very happy to see you.

See the complete 27-year series at [deannadikeman.com](http://deannadikeman.com).