

The Life at Home  
Magazine



# A BALANCED PLACE

Issue 01

**Artist Olaf Breuning**  
Opens up his heart, mind and space

**Your Home Can Make You Happy**  
Contentment in five simple steps

**Why We Are Getting Sleep Wrong**  
The quest for a restful night

**Tomorrow's World**  
A future vision of home

# Editor's

# Letter

**Katie McCrory**  
Life at Home Communications  
Leader, IKEA Retail (Ingka Group)



Photo by Austra Babiedaite

**H**ow do you feel when you put the key in your front door? It's a question we've asked people around the world countless times to help us understand something everyone has experienced but not many can put their finger on: the feeling of home. It's like trying to describe what love feels like, or any of the other wild and wonderful emotions we hold within us. Home is simply where we feel most like ourselves.

This last year has brought a lot of these feelings to the surface. For those who faced lockdown restrictions where they lived in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us were faced with being confined to a single space that needed to do and be everything for everyone – office, gym, school, playground. Something had to give; usually it was relaxation and a good night's sleep. Too many of us lost the time, space, and energy for the rituals and activities that create balance in our busy lives at home and let our minds run free. No wonder one in four of us said our mental health had suffered in the last 12 months.

Through this magazine we hope to expand on these experiences. It's a continuation of the research we do at IKEA through our annual Life at Home Report, which gives us a remarkable view into the spaces and places we occupy, the people and things we live with, and the emotions and dreams we're reaching for to truly feel at home. This year we explored mental health and its connection to home, which is how we know that four in ten people who felt more positive about their home this year also saw their mental health improve.

If life at home is personal, then this first edition of our magazine feels profoundly so. I've had the privilege of leading the Life at Home Report since 2017, and every year this research helps me understand more about myself. Last year, as we reckoned with the fallout of the pandemic, I also became a mother. During maternity leave, my home swung from sanctuary to prison, depending on the time of day and

what my hormones were up to. When I went back to work, the 90 square metres we had been nesting in were completely upended to make space for two working parents and a toddler who was likely to say 'Mamma's on a video call' as her first sentence. I'd be lying if I said it was easy. Hell – it's been the hardest year of my life. But it's also been the best.

**“The feeling of home – it's like trying to describe love.”**

That wild contradiction is where the data ends and the story starts. And stories can start in many ways, which is why we're sharing essays, interviews, manifestos, photographs, drawings and artifacts by contributors from all walks of life. I'm particularly drawn to the storytellers finding their feet in the everyday hustle of living, like Emma Beddington, who writes with warmth and humour about nights with insomnia; and Michelle Ogundehin, who gives home a rallying cry for happiness. I'm also thrilled that our writers took us into homes ranging from a Brooklyn brownstone walk-up to a historic Korean *hanok*; and we even popped our heads into a home in 2031 with the team at Near Future Laboratory.

All of our stories touch on the insights we found in the five things people talked about time and again: space, community, relationships, rituals, and the future. And what we heard was that happy homes make for happy people. We can prove it from the research, but we'll always feel it from experience.

I hope you find stories that speak directly to your experience, or offer a window into a life far removed from your own. In a year when travel has been so restricted, it's a joy to meet new people in other places through these pages. But the real power of their stories is that no matter where they take you, they'll always bring you back home. ●

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Erin Boyle, Breathing Space

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*This magazine is a new venture from the team behind the IKEA Life at Home Report at IKEA Retail (Ingka Group). See more at [lifeathome.ikea.com](https://lifeathome.ikea.com) and contact us at [life.athome.gl@ingka.com](mailto:life.athome.gl@ingka.com)*

# Contributors

With many thanks to all of those who participated in the making of the magazine. Here are just a handful of the people who made it happen.

## On the Cover ♥

Artist Olaf Breuning lives in the same New York neighbourhood as his friend and photographer, Sergiy Barchuk. And it is Sergiy who has so beautifully captured many of the themes of this magazine in our cover image. Sergiy found his way to photography after graduating with a degree in sociology, and as well as hanging out in Olaf's kitchen to shoot for us, he plays with shape and colour in his still-life photography, searching for "the transcendent moments that happen in the mundane". Much like Olaf, they both employ careful observation in their daily lives. *For the results see p64*



Photo by Sergiy Barchuk



## Paul Emmet ▲

English-born longtime resident of Estonia, Paul enjoys extended bright summer nights and hoary white winter days. Sauna freak, copywriter and editor, poet, environmentalist and photographer, he was thoroughly energised by interviewing whirlwind septuagenarian Dr. Aris LaTham for us. "Wow, just wow...What an inspiration!" he said. In fact, the pair hit it off so well that Paul is already planning to visit Dr. Aris in Panama. *To find out more, see p40*



Photo by Marianna Wahsten

## Michelle Ogundehin ▲

Interiors expert and judge on BBC2's *Interior Design Masters* Michelle used lockdown for "a celebration" of her own home. This included moving her son from his nursery into a new bedroom, in which she had installed a bed from IKEA. "I was like, 'Let's have some fun with your room now that you're bigger'. Together we chose paint, we put up wallpaper. It was as if we were creating a love story between him and his new room." *See p16 for her tips*



## Julian Bleecker

As Founder of Near Future Laboratory, design fiction is already part of Julian's world, in which he imagines future possibilities. "The entire world was rattled by the recent pandemic," he concedes. "But what we are going through is not science-fiction, as otherworldly as the last 24 months have felt. This is the world we live in, not a book we can close or a movie with a superhero coming in to save the world. It is up to us to save [it] so that it is more habitable, cleaner and greener. A world that accepts and creates based on the differences among us, where we are rewarded for making meaning, not just making money. I do not look forward to life continuing as it was. I look forward to how life can become." *See p112 for more*



## Sietske Gerla ▲

"Whoever designs a perfectly functional, not too expensive, and *beautiful* office chair will become a millionaire!" laughs Sietske Gerla, an interior designer for IKEA, as she admits back pain and the physiotherapist's advice finally saw her relinquish style for practicality. *To read more from her, see p39*

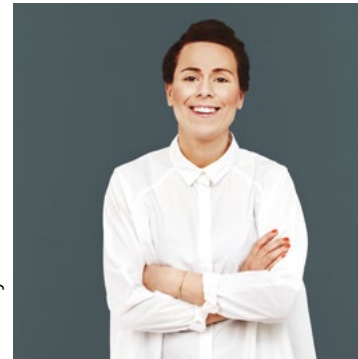


Photo by Monica Lundholm

## Teo Yang ▶

An architect based in Seoul, Teo has worked on numerous interior designs around the world. Here he lets us into his own home: a traditional *hanok*. Despite originating 500 years ago, "They still speak to people living in the 21st century," he says. *Judge for yourself on p28*



## Eftihia Stefanidi ▲

Wearing many hats as a creative director, photographer and co-founder of Shila, a *hôtel particulier* and art space in Athens, Greece, Eftihia knows how to make guests comfortable in beautiful spaces. But her visit to the scenic Greek island of Ikaria, was a moving and memorable experience, mostly because she was made so welcome and even invited to eat with the locals: "All home grown ingredients picked freshly from [the] land that morning, and paired with the local red wine. A priceless lunch." *Her photo story is on p84*



Photo by Shim Yun Suk from Studio Sim

## Mark Pagán ♥

An award-winning filmmaker, audio producer, and writer, Mark lives in Brooklyn, New York and for this magazine, he does a deep dive into men's friendships, and how to improve them. "The biggest lesson I still have to remind myself constantly is this: assume your friend is open to you reaching out. Assume that that person wants to hear from you, wants to be wanted," he says. "I think the phone is still a miraculous way to reconnect. But I don't know if I'd suggest making an initial phone call. Many of us fear the phone – picking it up or dialling it even to say hi to someone we know since puberty. So maybe no cold calls initially. Warm up to it." *For more of his good advice, see p58*



Photo by Tyler Blint Welsh

# Space



Is your home space supporting your headspace?

Home is where we should feel most like ourselves, but over the past year the way we use our spaces has shifted. To achieve balance, many of us have adapted our spaces to match our new way of life.

In the following pages we show that it has been both minor changes and major moves that made the biggest impact on the way people live. We also suggest five easy steps you can make to transform your home into your secret superpower. ►

# Breathing Space

In a year full of 'no', a family of five moved to a home where they could say 'yes' more often



**Erin Boyle** is a writer and blogger living in Brooklyn, New York. Her book *Simple Matters* is a nod to the growing consensus that living simply is more sustainable not only for the environment but for our own happiness and wellbeing. Having mastered small-space living, Erin was undaunted by the size of a one-bedroom apartment when she and her husband welcomed their third child. But as restrictions during the pandemic pulled walls in closer, the family found themselves needing more space to breathe. ▶



At Erin's, the family maintain a sense of space and possibility even within a relatively small footprint

Families with young children tend to move as a kind of amoebic blob. In a small space or a larger one, we're mostly always together. At any given moment I'll have a toddler clinging to my legs and another child in my lap or nuzzling under my armpit – squirmy bodily extensions headed in different directions. When we first welcomed our third child into a cosy one-bedroom home in Brooklyn, we weren't daunted by the size. We were used to togetherness, and besides, as we assured our wondering friends and family,

an apartment is a place to sleep and eat and come home to rest, but so much of the actual *living* happens out in the wider world. We had jobs, our kids had school and daycare, and we'd be in those places more often than we'd be in our apartment.

Until, of course, we weren't. Three weeks after bringing our new baby home, the coronavirus pandemic locked down New York City. Our quiet days of getting acquainted with our newborn were replaced by a spring spent unravelling

**“I wanted our new home to feel expansive even as so much of our world has shrunk, but I also found solace in its definitive boundaries.”**

in cramped quarters. We were lucky of course – all five of us were able to stay hunkered safely at home. Still, I think back on those early months and wonder at how we made it through them, keeping jobs and children and our own relationship intact.

The truth is that by September, we'd reached a breaking point. Working and attending school and one of us learning to crawl in that tiny space was taking its toll, and so we moved a mile down the road to an apartment with an extra 300 square feet (almost 28 square metres) and a footprint that spanned the floor of a pre-war brownstone. In lots of ways, this new apartment is just a stretched-out version of our last place. We haven't added much that's new, and the instincts of minimalism borne from years spent living in small living quarters haven't left us, but our breathing room has expanded.

Our new apartment became a place where we could say yes in a year full of nos. Last winter we granted permission to have our kids use their bunkbed as a climbing gym. We projected movies onto blank walls and made blanket forts to watch them from. We bought two cotton rag rugs for the floor of their room and pieced them together to form a gigantic soft spot to lounge, layered on top of the thickest rug pad we could find. In the living room I painted a wall-to-wall canvas floor cloth to cover sticky vinyl flooring, and the result has been a clean, smooth surface for

sprawling. We use every inch of it. By day it sees puzzles, games of checkers, and rolls of drawing paper. On most nights, the space becomes a dance floor. (If you shine a torch through the crystal hanging from the centre of the old chandelier and spin circles around it, it's a disco ball.)

I wanted our new home to feel expansive even as so much of our world has ►

Erin has covered the floor tiles with a huge canvas floor cloth to bring warmth to the apartment



shrunk, but I also found solace in its definitive boundaries. In an apartment that is mercifully more spacious than our last, a tiny antechamber office is the place I go to escape – and work. This spring I found an antique door that fits perfectly in the frame of the small doorway – a solid wood centenarian with its original glass knob – and hanging it felt symbolic. Now, when the door is closed and strains of classical piano are playing through

a speaker, it's possible to find quiet, and piece my thoughts together. The space isn't mine alone – like every spot in a small space, its functions are many. While we're both still working from home, my husband and I trade off using it during the day, and at night we wheel in a mini-crib and draw the charcoal-coloured shade. Our workday sanctuary for adults becomes a toddler's nighttime sanctuary for sleep.

Erin's family's dining/living room is a place where they all gather together even if they're working on separate projects or tasks



Photos by Jurate Veceraite



The kids' bedroom – the biggest room in the apartment, which functions as a family room as well

**“Now, when the door is closed and strains of classical piano are playing through a speaker, it’s possible to find quiet and piece my thoughts together.”**

Elsewhere, doors are a comfort, too. Two sets of French doors separate the three main rooms in the apartment, and on fall evenings when the sun sets early and everyone is still wide awake past dark, I like to leave the curtains – bed sheets I stripped into four pieces and hung from thin rods – open on the glass doors. I light a tall beeswax taper and watch its flickering reflection through the two sets of doors. From the dining table I can see kids playing – peacefully, if I’m lucky – from a distance. They’re still little and we’re not out of the amoeba stage yet, but at bedtime, when we draw the curtains and close the doors, an apartment that sees so much movement during the day goes still. Our bedroom, which serves as the main thoroughfare through our home during the day, becomes its own little nest at night, and more than a year later, the quiet thrill of being able to fall asleep in a room of our own hasn’t worn off. ●



# Your Home Can Make You Happy

Five simple steps to harness its power



Photo by Ben Anders

Michelle Ogundehin shares her expert tips

An internationally renowned author, TV presenter and brand consultant on interiors, trends, wellbeing, and lifestyle, **Michelle Ogundehin** is also known to many as a head judge on *Interior Design Masters*, a landmark show for BBC2. Her book *Happy Inside* was released at the end of April 2020, nearly at the same time many of us, confined within our four walls, came to the realisation: we want something different from our lives at home.

According to the IKEA Life at Home Report 2021, 14% of people around the world said that their homes don't meet their mental health and wellbeing needs. Michelle's own pursuit of 'home' has been a lengthy story too with its fair share of upheaval and disappointment. It's a journey that's taken her through nondescript student rooms where she endlessly moved the furniture around to try to make them feel better and years of "rubbish rentals". But it finally culminated in her current home, a place described as her safe space to "retreat and leave the world with all its noise behind" – somewhere she could rebuild both the home and herself, from the inside out.

"Your home environment is the third pillar for a good life. It is as important to your wellbeing as good food and exercise. I believed this before the pandemic, but now the truth of this belief resonates with

many who may not have really considered the importance of their homes in this way before. Life was previously moving faster than many could cope with. And home was just a place to leave in the morning and crash back into, exhausted, at night. I believe that home should be the ultimate foundation for the life you dream of having and the nurturing relationships you deserve. Because from such a space you can achieve a sense of balance that will assist you in finding your true purpose and fulfilling your potential."

As she is working on her next book, *Simple Inside: Master Your Space, Master Your Life*, intended as the toolkit companion to *Happy Inside*, Michelle shares five steps for harnessing the power of home for health and happiness. "My home is my sanctuary and my secret superpower! These are guidelines that delve deeper than décor. Rather, the goal is to help you to become your best self through home." ►

# 01

## Clear: make space for what you need

Make no mistake: clutter is the arch enemy of a happy mind and a healthy home. To be clear, I don't mean your stuff, your possessions. Personally, I love nothing more than to be surrounded by the things that I love – these are the talismans of my life. But clutter is something else. Clutter is broken things, unloved things, things saved just in case, gifted things that we feel obliged to keep, and things that do not work. These are the things that drain our energy, crowd our cupboards, and sabotage serenity. Get rid of these and you literally clear space to create more life in your home.

Plus, today we need our homes to work harder than ever before. They must be our retreats for relaxation while also being our productive workspaces; they must be inspirational spots for creativity, homework, and exercise as well as enable calm and quiet at the end of the day. Balancing all of this starts with living only with what you need. In this way, with room to breathe and space to think, we can live a more meaningful life. And we can start to understand that this kind of 'space' is not necessarily physical space but the absence of all that is extraneous. In other words, you begin to become spacious in yourself, fearless, and completely at ease. ►





## 02

### Cleanse: create a healthy environment

The second step to a healthy home is to surround yourself with texture and be mindful of all materials that you bring into your abode. As physical sensory beings, we have a primal need to surround ourselves with surfaces that thrill our fingertips or tempt our toes. Tactile stimulation triggers oxytocin, the love hormone. It also lowers cortisol levels, reducing anxiety and stress. And in today's digital era of super-smooth screens, maximal texture at home literally puts us back 'in touch' with ourselves.

Clean, ergo natural, materials are therefore essential too, for example: wood that's free of solvents; wool, cotton, or linen-based fabrics for rugs to upholstery; and organic materials for any other surfaces. Think stone, brick, marble, or ceramic tile. Wobbly pots and things made from humble materials like cardboard, plywood, or hemp add authenticity and speak of sustainability. Baskets in rattan, sisal, or wickerwork are all wonderful to use and highly multi-functional – use them to store magazines and papers, as plant holders, or for bathroom storage.

Finally, introduce houseplants to every room. They are nature's air-purifying ninjas, highly effective at ridding your home of many airborne pollutants. And start reading the labels on the back of every cleaning product before you consider buying it. If you see a toxic warning symbol, it has no place in your happy, healthy home-as-haven. Natural alternatives exist. You are what you breathe. Make the switch. ►



# 03

## Colour: add joy

More than anything else, the colours that you choose for your home set its mood music.

Colour directly impacts your energy levels, and its associated psychology is a subject that has filled many a tome. In simple terms, however, colour is emotion. Certain shades can make you feel happy, on edge, calm, excited, or flat – and every nuance in between. So, colour is the big gun in your decorative arsenal. But only if you choose those hues which really sing to you. Only once you've done this are you ready to decorate.

How? Think moods. In any given room, ask yourself: how do I want to feel in here? Relaxed or energised, sociable or in retreat? Answering these sorts of questions will help you to identify which shade of your chosen hues you might lean towards, from cool to hot.

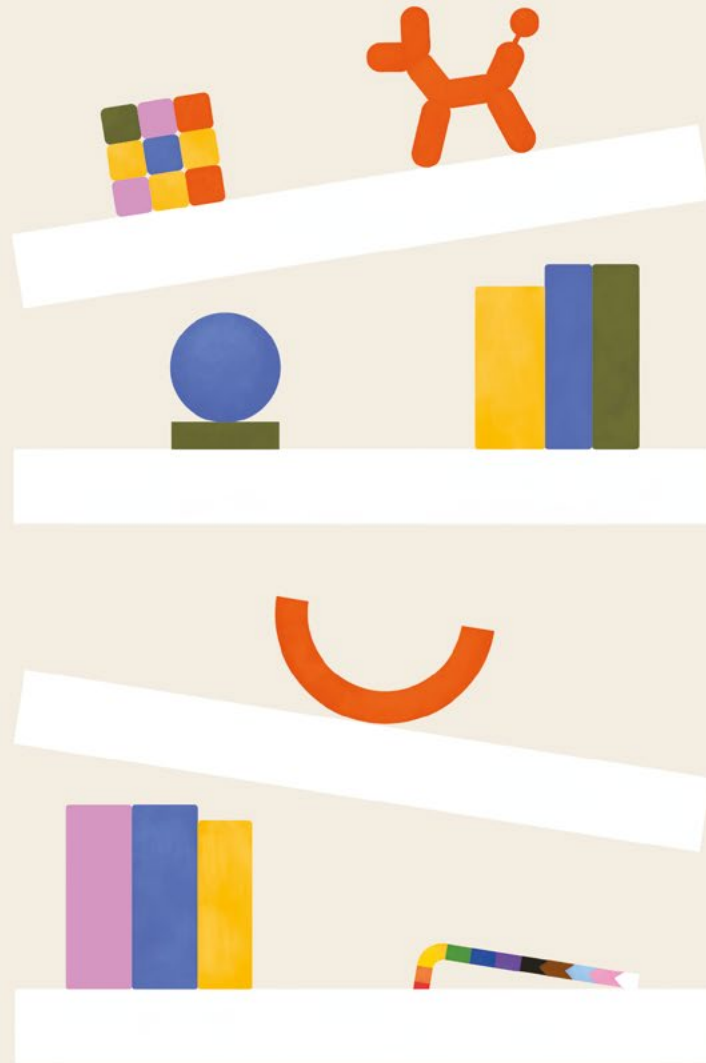
Then dive in deeper. Which is your preferred season of the year? Where do you feel happiest – seaside or mountains, city or country? What was your favourite holiday destination, and what did you love about it? This is the way to identify the finer threads of your taste. Translate that into colours and materials and you start to be able to decorate your home to sustain, soothe, and support you. This is the fast track to home as your secret superpower! ►

# 04

## Curate: make it personal

No one wants a cookie-cutter home that looks identical to their neighbour's. Sure, many of us aspire to ideals of cleanliness and tidiness, a sense of order, and as much natural light as possible, but beyond that we need our homes to be personalised. Full of the things that speak our story – who we are, what we love, what inspires us or makes us laugh. This is the path to authenticity and purpose. And as we noted in step one, these things are not clutter. They are the cornerstones of our lives, and they should be cherished and given the respect they deserve.

Display shelves then are practically gospel to my mind – dedicated space within which to arrange your treasures. It may be a mantelpiece, the top of a sideboard, or a set of floating shelves within an alcove. It doesn't really matter where it is or what it's made of, just that you have secured a special space to showcase meaningful pieces. To carefully arrange, dust, and love such items is to be able to draw strength from them. They also serve to remind us who we are, where we came from, and who we wish to become. ►





# 05

## Craft: the all-important homespun touch

We are by our very nature creative beings. We have made things since the dawn of time. It's hard-wired into our psyches, even for those of us who may believe that we do not have an artistic bone in our bodies. Therefore, to include hand-crafted items within our homes, whether made by ourselves or others, is to call to our deeper selves. It could be as simple as sticking our kid's paintings on the wall, hanging a macramé plant holder, or buying a chunky hand-knitted throw. Such things bring us comfort on a different level to factory-made items or anything with hard surfaces and sharp edges.

They also celebrate the people within your home. The confidence boost for a child to see their paintings honoured this way is immeasurable as is the love shown when someone gracefully accepts their partner's collection of china figurines. Or better yet, creates a dedicated storage system for them. Honestly representing the stories, likes, and lives of every individual within a home is the fast track to creating a happy home for all. ●

# Escape Rooms

Architect **Teo Yang** believes that creating a home requires a closer look at who we really are. He has turned his *hanok*, a traditional-style Korean house, into a place in which he can find inner peace. But having spent more time at home of late, Teo has also discovered a sense of freedom that can be found indoors.

## Inside Teo Yang's *hanok*



A Seoul-based architect finds new ways to travel without leaving his home

### What is a *hanok*?

Originating in the 14th century, a *hanok* is a traditional Korean house that works in harmony with nature to create calm and serenity. The architecture considers the positioning of the house in relation to its surroundings, with thought given to the land and seasons. A *hanok* is built almost entirely of natural materials such as earth, wood and rock which creates a healthy and eco-friendly environment. ▶



Our built environments shape our lives. Increasingly, architects are considering how the spaces we inhabit influence the way we feel about ourselves. One of them is Korean architect Teo Yang, who uses his home studio – a *hanok* – as a testing ground for impactful design, merging traditional principles and contemporary elements.

His architectural practice creates physical and visual harmony between the (interior) space itself and the environment around it. However, just like most of us, he has found it challenging to maintain this balance in the past year. And like the 60% of people who said they've had to change the way their home is organised to do the activities they want or need to do at home, Teo was no exception.

Here he opens up to our writer, Monique Schröder, about why he went 'Seoul searching' almost a decade ago, how he describes his relationship with his home, and what he changed in it to restore a feeling of mental wellbeing. ►



Achieving a balance between a traditional aesthetic and contemporary art and design always gives Teo colossal joy. He especially enjoys mornings when the sunlight comes through the window and creates beautiful shadow patterns. Artwork by Lee Bae



A collection of vintage earthenware with a vase designed by Teo. The vase is composed of natural rock and a chrome sphere that resembles the traditional Korean philosophy of the universe

**“I believe home is equal parts foundation and platform. It’s a place that can morph you into a better version of yourself.”**

**Since leaving home at the age of 19 and studying interior architecture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, you have worked in many vibrant cities in different parts of the world, such as Amsterdam, Berlin, and Los Angeles. What motivated you to move back to South Korea and live in a traditional *hanok*?**

**Teo Yang:** Even though I have spent a lot of time abroad – both studying and working – I had the desire to learn more about my roots and dig deeper into South Korean culture. I have always been fascinated by traditional architecture from all around the world and how these centuries-old philosophies embrace a sense of comfort and protection in a very unique way. I believe that they also give insight into how we can find the balance between nature and human-made structures. So, moving back to Seoul naturally went hand in hand with seeking a *hanok* as my home base. For me, it represents the best of both worlds: the values and lifestyle of South Korea.

**What does the concept of home mean to you?**

I believe home is equal parts foundation and platform. It’s a place that can morph you into a better version of yourself. It also functions as a notebook for your personal and family history. In short, our homes are an important tool for our lives. And to fully make use of them, it is essential to understand our lifestyle, what makes us happy, what we deem comfortable, and what kind of aesthetic excites us. But it requires some research and a closer look into ourselves.

**Has this definition changed during the past 12 months?**

Things have definitely changed a lot. Our homes have become a huge part of our everyday life. A lot of people are recognising what is truly indispensable in their lives. Creating a meaningful and functional space has become so important that it has pushed us to rethink our definition of luxury in the ▶



spaces we inhabit. Moreover, these extraordinary times have enabled us to uncover what we want to achieve in our lives and how we can integrate more work/life balance in the future. I believe it's a very positive change because it offers the opportunity to look back and reflect on what is needed for us to improve our overall wellbeing.

**Mental wellbeing has become one of the most crucial elements in the wake of the pandemic. What do you consider a balanced state of being at home? And would you say that you have truly found balance?**

Wellbeing means feeling comfortable with yourself and finding places of improvement within yourself. I found the perfect mix of comfort and the willingness to improve inside my own space. It gives me so much joy! I see my home as the physical embodiment of my mind. And a well-designed home provides

the perfect setting for the mind to stay conscious and focused. I have lived in my current *hanok* for eight years. It has enabled me to find true inner peace – a recurring theme that I also focus on in my work. Even though I have remodelled the *hanok*, which is more than a century old, its original design language and function are still relevant today – especially as we have understood that the true way of preserving an important piece of heritage means constantly evolving and improving it to meet our contemporary needs and wellbeing goals.

**With that being said, would you describe your *hanok* as a 'home space for your headspace'?**

Definitely! It is a great home office as well. It's quiet and the neutral setting is perfect for creative work. The framed inner courtyard, where I can observe the change from day to evening, helps me to concentrate on my daily schedule.

**You mentioned that no matter if you're designing for a client or yourself, inner peace is an important element of the process. By mixing modern aesthetics with tradition, you have created many spaces that are characterised by a sense of timelessness and wellbeing. What have you learned the most from creating such simple but rewarding spaces?**

I believe every creation or improvement needs a good foundation. Carrying traditions into modern interiors is a means to provide us with a notion of where we belong. It also helps us to retain and improve our culture. It's no secret that the way we design spaces has a huge impact on our wellbeing. And because we start and end our day in the personal environments we are in, it becomes a foundation for everything we do. That's why I strive to create rituals, for example, waking up in a room with peaceful daylight and going to bed with a soft reading lamp beside me. Doing so wakes up our bodies for the everyday tasks ahead of us – and

even more importantly, it helps our minds to find a balance between rest and work. Inside my own home, my daily routines are programmed by the different rooms. I start every day by waking up in the lightfilled bedroom next to my studio office that overlooks the garden and into the dining room that's completed with beautiful architectural details. I love all the different spaces, especially how the light and surrounding landscape are invited inside.

**As a master of balance, was there anything inside your home that you adjusted to reflect your current way of living or being?**

I have taken the chance to renovate my basement into a much simpler and more modern-looking space. I always wanted a space where I could isolate myself and relax inside an aesthetically different setting. Every time I step into the new room, I feel like I am travelling to a different world. It gives me a sense of freedom! ●

Teo's bedroom featuring Savoir Beds – Moon 01 bed, designed by Teo in a collaboration with the luxury brand



Interview by Monique Schröder, photos by Shim Yun Suk from Studio Sim

The basement features Teo's most recent art collection, a wall-size artwork by Chinese artist ZhaoZhao. The clean and minimal aesthetic of the basement media room is also adorned with several vintage collections and an antique wood table lamp

**“I have lived in my current *hanok* for eight years. It has enabled me to find true inner peace.”**

# Sustainable Space

## Bringing the outside in

Tips on building a better balance with nature from Country Sustainability Manager at IKEA Retail Denmark, Monica Keaney

### Better off with less

"The backbone to a lot of our sustainability and circularity projects is trying to dismantle this notion that the more things we have, the better off we are," Monica explains. When we declutter (as many of us did during lockdown), we see how much waste is created by buying what we don't need. "We've reached a tipping point - we must make our belongings last longer, give them new purpose, refurbish and repair them, and pass them on in a responsible way."

### Start small

To avoid accumulating unnecessary possessions, Monica recommends small DIY projects to experiment with creative upcycling. "There's no need to bite off more than you can chew," she laughs. "Rethink

your home step by step and start with one project that feels achievable and manageable."

### Keep the love alive

"Our views towards public and private space have shifted," says Monica. You might have walked alone in a park to clear your head, met family outside, or even gone on an al fresco date. In lockdown, nature has been key in keeping our relationships alive, and its role in our everyday life has changed. "The pandemic has made us realise we're all united in so many things, with our need to spend time in nature one of the most important."

### A tiny piece of green

Not everyone lives near a park or a forest. But the IKEA Life at Home Report 2021 shows having a tiny bit of nature in the home

became crucial, with 53% of people in the UK saying access to a private garden or balcony has grown in importance. "Reconnecting with nature doesn't have to be complicated," Monica assures us. "Use balconies or windowsills to grow flowers and herbs, which will ease the mind and contribute to mental wellbeing."

### Go wild

To encourage people to engage with nature, IKEA in Denmark in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund, invited them to rewild as much space as they could, and become a part of a bigger biodiversity platform. "I have a miniscule backyard in Copenhagen," Monica says. "And I decided to rewild two square metres." Her two are now part of 3 million square metres Monica's fellow Danes have contributed. ●

### DID YOU KNOW...

- 1 in 4 people globally say accessing green space is important for helping them maintain their mental wellbeing at home
- 28% of people say spaciousness has grown most in importance over the last 12 months



Interviewed by Joseph Hutchinson, written by Deimante Bulbenkaite

# The Bigger Picture:

**How have we been adjusting our spaces to better suit the way we live?**

**Lemya Osman**  
Home Furnishing Direction Leader,  
IKEA Retail North America

## Falling Back In Love With Home



making significant effort to reorganise their homes are like those who accept that their worldly relationships require work. And the new anthem for modern relationships is 'set clear boundaries'.

"We have seen people looking for ways to zone their space. For example, I had to set a barrier between 'work' and 'home', assigning different areas. For me, it has been very challenging to switch off from work. I even hide my laptop case after working hours! And when my friends ask me for advice about how to make the most of the space they have, I always advise them to create zones for different activities first. And sometimes it's about having dual-use areas, on the condition that a lot of stuff gets tucked away once it's not needed."

"Before, our homes were places we used to get away from the world. Not anymore. Now our homes are the world for us. We don't know when this reality will end."

At the Table Talk discussion launching the IKEA Life at Home Report 2021, Lemya Osman revealed what she observed as people getting to know their 'homeworlds' better. People

Tucked away where? "Storage has become big, in the US and globally. The pandemic made a lot of people realise that

their homes can easily become cluttered and unorganised. At IKEA we know how to organise things and we've shown them how accessible and affordable it can be."

Another heart-warming way that our homes have been nurturing our feelings: "We missed feeling different at different times. Sales data shows that during the pandemic people in the US didn't go for big furniture. Instead, we have seen a hike in sales of home accessories. People went for simple things like a new set of candles that changed their feeling of the same space."

And how has Lemya's feelings changed towards her home? "I've fallen in love with my home! Before it was a place of simply going in and out. By staying inside, sitting and observing, I got the opportunity to get reintroduced to and connect with my space. I've recognised the potential of my home, which has been underused."

# Space

Changing our homes helps us feel better about them. Half of those (47%) who made significant efforts to reorganise their homes now feel more positive about them, compared to 1 in 3 (33%) of those who made very little effort or none at all.

IKEA Life at Home Report 2021

**Sietske Gerla**  
Interior Design Specialist,  
IKEA Retail (Ingka Group)

## The Office Chair Will Creep Into Your Space

"Whoever designs a perfectly functional, not too expensive, and beautiful office chair will become a millionaire!" Sietske says, the point being that the quest to do so is still on.

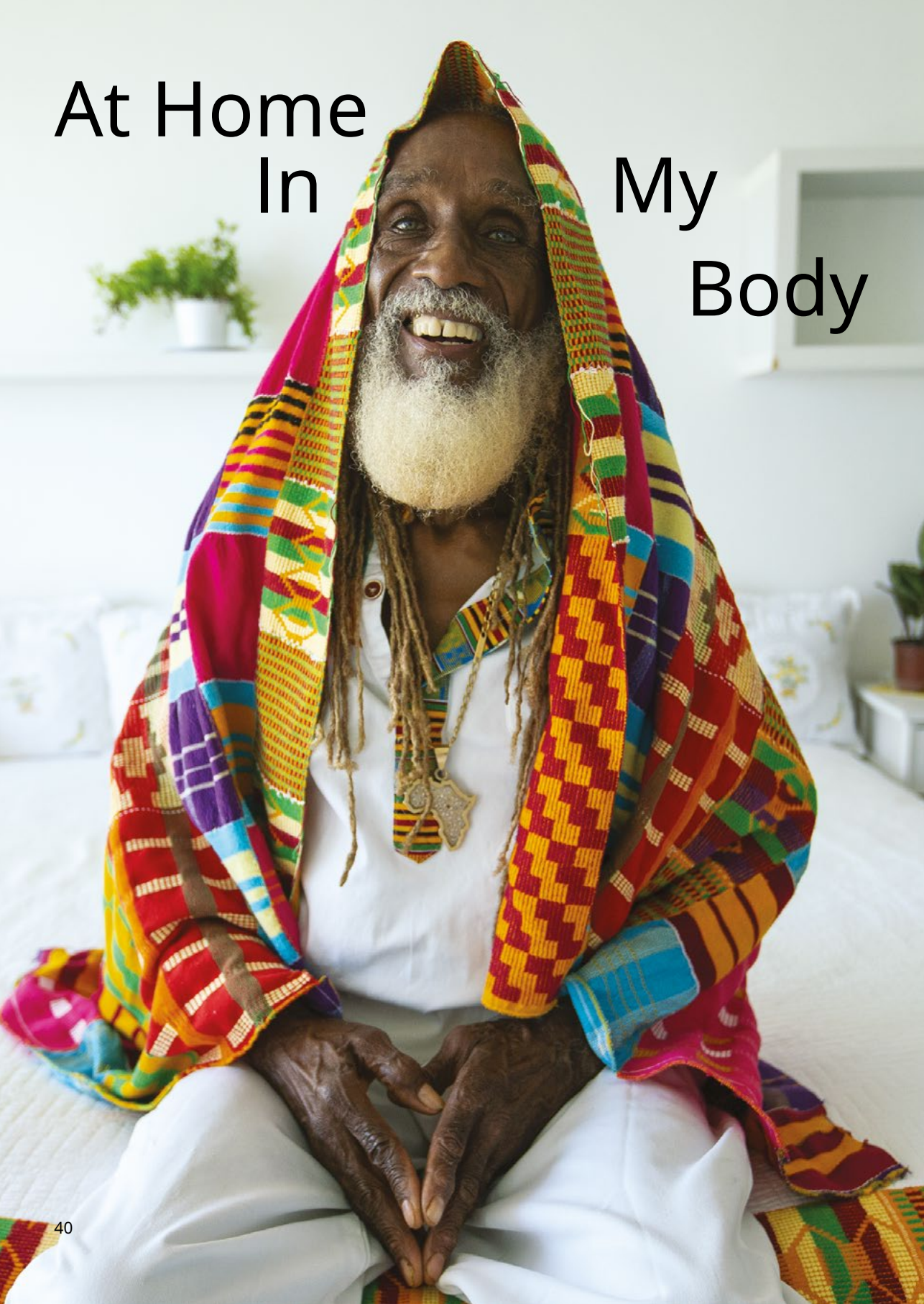
The single most visible intruder into her home – the big, grey office chair – sits next to Sietske's beautiful, second-hand, old-school wooden desk, her bedroom workstation. The desk is perfect. But the chair doesn't pass the meticulous designer's review. "I refused to sit in an office chair until the end." So many of us can empathise. It was her back pain and her physiotherapist who changed her mind.

"What I love about working at IKEA is that my job as a designer is to serve the bigger purpose of people having a better life at home. Currently, we work with the insight that people now do way more activities at home than they did before. And for many people, working from home has become an integral part of their routine. At IKEA, we take this idea into consideration when working on almost all our designs. A dining chair becomes adjustable. A kitchen trolley serves to roll the 'work stuff' from the dining table into a closet once it's past working hours." Her intuition says that when we fast-forward to the future, many people will prefer having proper workstations at home. "The

question today is, 'What do you want to sacrifice in your home to have it?' The perfect office chair that integrates beautifully with the home is still a work in progress, ha!" ●



# At Home In My Body



## The culinary innovator who feels at home anywhere in the world

**Dr. Aris LaTham** is a Panama ‘local boy’, but this boy is a luminary in the international ethical raw gourmet food domain. When he moved back to Panama City into a new penthouse last year, Aris, at age 74, did not have retirement in mind. With years of knowledge and experience under his belt, he moved with a mission to promote vibrant, ‘sunfired’ food in a place where his ideas could flourish.

An attraction spot for expats and retirees from all over the world, Panama City is also home to raw food pioneer Dr. Aris LaTham. Leaving Panama in 1964 as a teenager, he set off around the world on a journey that took him through Central and South America, from New York City’s Harlem neighbourhood to the Caribbean, and finally led him back to his birthplace.

During this time, he accumulated an extensive knowledge of plants, herbs, nutrition, diet, mindfulness, and wellbeing. His memorable catchphrase, “It’s not the food in your life, but the life in your food”, informs his every decision and is testament to his glowing presence and trim physique. A self-taught culinary innovator, Dr. Aris – who has a PhD in Food Science – has trained thousands of chefs in the principles of harmonic, healthy and ethical food. And now he is home in his native Panama after a 60-year odyssey

with no sign of slowing down; continuing to teach at the Sunfired Culinary Institute he founded, filming for SunfiredTV, and hosting retreats at his organic farm.

It’s just past 9am in Panama City and Aris is on the rooftop of his apartment surrounded by an explosion of orange flowers with green leaves the size and shape of shovels. Over 100 years ago, Aris’ grandparents arrived in Panama from Jamaica and Barbados, migrants who worked on building the famous canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. “It was a privileged position to be working for the US government,” Aris recalls of his childhood. A cultural melting pot, the region of Colon was settled by over 100,000 islanders from the British and French Caribbean islands. Young Aris, from an English-speaking family, was educated in Spanish, growing up with three cultures at the same time: West Indian, American, and Latin. ▶



One of three of the Sunfired Culinary Institute's kitchens with a view of the Bay of Panama that welcomes over 12 hours of natural sunlight



Dr. Aris constantly engages in answering the questions of hungry health-seekers from all corners of the world

So how has Panama changed? "It's definitely a whole lot more. Back then, I was viewing things through the eyes of a teenager. I only knew what was in my neighbourhood. I'd go into the forest to find mangoes and oranges, and knew the basics within that environment. But now I have this whole world view, flexibility and mobility. With the farm now, and having seen how things are produced in other parts of the world, makes me realise Panama is full of abundance."

Aris' penthouse overlooks the bay, just 30 minutes from a jungle brimming with tropical botanical species and wildlife. His 'city campus' blends culinary arts with the outdoor elements. Multiple kitchens (without stoves!) follow an open-plan layout, with curious and colourful birds frequent visitors. There are three kitchens, a study room, four guest bedrooms, a library and small private wing where Aris rests and recharges for the day.

Nevertheless, Aris feels less like an inhabitant of his house, and more like an inhabitant of his body, so he doesn't have much to say when it comes to interiors. A few months ago, after first returning to Panama, he became so caught up in the whirlwind of activity to reestablish his life there, that his normal routine slipped, and he forgot to adhere to his own principles of following your body's natural cycles. He found himself working 18-hour days, sleeping for four or five hours and starting all over again. Quickly realising he was losing his equilibrium, he returned to avoiding screens at night and now prioritises getting a solid 8 hours of sleep, after which he will get the day started. "I do what I call my 'internal shower,'" he reveals. "Lots of coconut water, shots of lemon juice, aloe vera juice, and mint leaf juice - something strong to wake up my cells."

An hour-long workout follows, running or walking around his 700-acre farm harvesting fruits from the 7,000 coconut trees and 100 varieties of fruit tree growing there. A video posted online of him climbing a tree to retrieve a coconut went viral, clocking up millions of views. He seems to find this quite amusing.

"My philosophy is about looking at a daily cycle, the 24 hours the human body goes through. Sleeping for eight hours means we are fasting, which shuts the whole digestive system down so the body can do repair work by breaking down old cells and building new cells." The first eight hours of his day is the 'breaking of the fast' period, not breakfast, to draw out impurities. At night, we have eight hours to empty the waste bin. "What we do is supposed to facilitate that elimination. Avoid foods that tax the digestive system,

instead feed the body electrical foods, basically fruits, which comprise moisture and fibre. We get the body ready for the third phase of our day - refuelling with building materials."

Aris puts a lot of energy into passing on his wisdom. His website, sunfired.com, is bursting with colour and recipes brimming with flavour. His own Sunfired Culinary Institute offers retreats, nature expeditions and cooking courses. He also holds workshops for the local youth on the importance of a healthy diet and employment.

The central tenet to Aris' efforts is that our main home is our body, and its building and maintenance is where we can find the energy to cherish and nourish both our family and community. ●

**Succeed like Dr. Aris**

The Panama local has a clear priority list for how we should be living: "My body is my home. This temple comes first before anything else," is his mantra. "All human beings can agree there are three things essential for living: food, clothing, and shelter. My number one investment on the top of my shopping list is my food. If I have any money left, then I go find some clothes. And anything left after that goes into my shelter. Living here in a penthouse, or my 700-acre farm, to me means I have taken care first and foremost of my body, by investing in my food. I am eating the best way possible. Because I want to live in the most expensive body, I can build it by selecting top-notch, quality, high-vibration food."



Interview by Paul Emmet, photos by Mandela Gregoire

## Making daily routines work for our wellbeing

With everything that's going on between our four walls, and with the many ways we are using our homes to be productive, it hasn't been easy to find time and space for positive daily rituals.

We have had to draw clear spatial boundaries and be more intentional about how we spend our time at home to get the most out of it. That could be anything from how you sleep to taking up a new hobby, or simply organising which room in your house is used for what purpose. ▶

# Rituals

# The Long Scroll Goodnight

One woman's fight to find sleep



Photo by Alex Telfer

Writer and journalist Emma Beddington studies her own attempts at shut-eye and finds out we're doing it all wrong

As someone who struggles with sleep herself, **Emma Beddington** is keen to listen to other people's experiences and to try different approaches. "I'm sceptical about anything that claims to have a magic cure for insomnia," she says. "What I like is to explore insomnia as a natural part of human experience: of course we need sleep, but sometimes there can be magic in the silent, empty, sleepless hours." For Emma it was the acceptance of the experience of not sleeping that helped her to sleep. Here she begs the question, are we fundamentally getting sleep wrong?

It's bedtime, and everything is ready for the perfect night. My pillows are plumped and spritzed with lavender and my thick, heavy curtains are drawn, casting the cool bedroom into inky darkness. On my bedside table, there's a 'sleep mist' for my face and a 'sleep concentrate' full of soporific ingredients to rub on my pulse points. The light on my e-reader is turned down low, and the blankets are heavy. It's the perfect sleep cocoon. The only problem is I'm not in it.

I'm downstairs, slumped on the sofa, the TV flickering in the background as I stare at my phone. The soothing chamomile tea I made to take to bed with me is cooling by my side as I check out my enemies' photographs and read an email I know will stress me out. After that, I scroll through social media until my thumbs ache, getting far too deep into other people's

arguments. I'm tired – so tired. Too tired for common sense and too tired to face the prospect of all the 'bedmin' (my name for the tedious business of washing, brushing, flossing, and undressing). But I'm not too tired, apparently, to read an extremely long article about an unusual kind of pasta or to stare at pictures and try and work out which of two bears is fatter. When I do finally drag myself upstairs, I hold my toothbrush in one hand and my phone in the other. That video of a warthog attacking a tourist isn't going to watch itself, is it?

You know – we all know – how that turns out. Another dismal night, unable to drop off, turning over my pillow to find a fresh bit, restlessly changing position, trying to avoid the temptation to look at the clock and discover just how little sleep I'll be getting. ►



I'm a sometime-insomniac, desperate for more REM: there is nothing I hate more than watching, wide awake and despairing, as the hours between 1 and 4am tick by, resenting my husband's deep breathing as he sleeps peacefully beside me. But do I actually do what I need to do to improve my sleep? Not so much.

Does this happen to you? I'm fairly sure I'm not alone in sabotaging my own best efforts to sleep. The statistics back me up: 55% of people surveyed in recent IKEA research rate sleep as their most important wellbeing activity at home, but a 2019 Philips Global Sleep Survey study revealed 62% of adults don't think they sleep well.

**“My late-night scrolling is a recognised phenomenon: ‘revenge bedtime procrastination’. It’s what you do when you should sleep but are also desperate to carve out time for yourself.”**

Sleep is essential: without it we are miserable and stupid (I can confirm this personally – I spent 15 minutes looking for my keys this morning and found them in the fridge). A lack of it impacts our mood, memory, and ability to manage stress. It even affects our physical health. The pandemic brought an unhelpful companion epidemic of ‘coronasomnia’ worldwide, with multiple studies reporting worsening sleep as, stuck at home, we battled our fears. That has further raised our awareness of how much we all need sleep to function and stay healthy and happy.

We're willing to throw money at the problem: the value of the global sleep economy grows inexorably year on year. It is predicted to hit an astonishing \$518 billion in 2022. That's a lot of eye masks, mattress toppers, and lavender sprays. We know more than ever, too, about the timing, quality and patterns of our sleep thanks to advances in wearable

technology. You can find out everything from your oxygen levels to your sleep phases; a wristband can do everything short of interpreting your dreams now (and that can't be far behind). But we are still, fundamentally, getting sleep wrong.

Sometimes we know very well we are doing it wrong but we can't – or won't – stop. My late-night scrolling is a recognised phenomenon: ‘revenge bedtime procrastination’, a term derived from the Mandarin expression *bàofùxìng áoyè*. It's what you do when you should sleep but are also desperate to carve out a bit of time for yourself from a packed day of work and other obligations. ‘I should go to bed’, I tell myself every night, ‘but

I deserve some me-time. I matter! Then I watch an hour of videos of owls and cats making friends. Might it be better to say ‘I matter’ by getting eight hours of sleep? Sure, but where's the fun in that?

We make other mistakes too, because sleep science is still in its infancy: it's a discipline where we are still very much feeling our way in the dark. That means – advice can be contradictory or counter-intuitive. Now, science tells us, you shouldn't try to ‘catch up’ on sleep at the weekends or with long naps. It upsets your circadian rhythms (your body clock, which regulates your sleeping and waking cycles). Or if you think the way to maximise sleep is to spend as long as possible in bed, think again. One of the most successful current therapies for insomnia is ‘sleep restriction’, which only allows you to stay in bed for as long as you normally sleep, even if that's just two or three hours. Sleep ‘efficiency’ – the

proportion of your time in bed you actually spend asleep – is now believed to be more important than hours horizontal.

The possibilities for confusion are endless: for a basic animal instinct, sleep has become awfully complicated. Don't use potions and herbal remedies, experts say. Fussy rituals and aids tend to be counter-productive. Time to take those herbal remedies that promise ‘quality shuteye’ and ‘dreamier dreams’ out of my online basket. Should you take a hot bath before bed? Probably, but don't make it too hot – a lower body temperature helps you sleep. Would more exercise help? It might, but make sure you finish 90 minutes before you go to bed. Otherwise, the endorphins could keep you awake. And here's another oddity – research suggests historically we

used to divide our night's sleep into two phases: a first shift at dusk, then a break of an hour or two, then a second sleep. Perhaps some of us are still wired for this ‘biphasic sleep’ and what we're calling insomnia is actually entirely natural?

It's enough to keep anyone awake at night. What to do? Here's my (intensely hypocritical) sleep prescription: don't think about it. Get some natural light during the day and put your phone away at night, sure. But apart from that, the best thing you can do is give up and let the sleepy mammal inside you do whatever it needs to do. We know how to sleep. We just have to relax and let it happen. Which is exactly what I'll be telling myself tonight, just as soon as I've watched this video of a cat being surprised by a cucumber... ●



Illustration by Indre Surdokaite

# The Bigger Picture:

**How can we make our daily rituals work for our wellbeing?**

**Helena Gouveia**  
Country Marketing Manager,  
IKEA Retail Sweden

## A Salute To Exhausted Parents

Helena moved from Portugal to Sweden a few months ago with her husband and two boys to oversee the growth of the IKEA brand in its mother market – and it still gives her goosebumps. With her new move, she launched a campaign called Still Standing, which is an anthem to exhausted parents. With its namesake's

Elton John hit playing in the background, the commercial accurately portrays the eternal quest of under-equipped parents to stay above water.

"This is a group of people who already have an explosion of needs around the home and struggles with sleepless nights, with cranky kids, with many needs throughout the day, and how those issues also affect couples in their relationships," Helena empathises. "Adding to that, the anxiety of the global pandemic, the tension of not knowing how hazardous the virus would be for families and children, and the lockdowns made it clear that we needed to salute all the mums and dads out there, that they are doing a great job, and that they need to take care of themselves." Various social media platforms revealed an outpouring of shared experience, opening a revelatory

window on the trials of juggling the different demands.

For Helena, silent breaks helped her to connect with herself and to pull through this past year. "My home has been the most productive space ever! It was a struggle to both work and run school at home for both my kids. One of my rituals has been to prepare some nice tea in the morning, light a candle, and enjoy that moment while turning on my computer and checking my e-mail. That wouldn't be possible in the office!"

How could IKEA help parents return to nourishing rituals? "We can give ideas that are simple to implement. Ideas for me-time, for creating new activities with kids that also make parents feel good. The sky's the limit! But it requires homes to be spaces where communication flows freely and people are eager to find common ground."



# Rituals

Our homes have become more productive places in the last few years, but sleeping, relaxing, and spending time alone are key to achieving balance. These were the three activities people globally rated as most important for maintaining a sense of mental wellbeing at home.

IKEA Life at Home Report 2021

**Monica Keaney**  
Country Sustainability Manager,  
IKEA Retail Denmark

## Slow-cooked Sustainable Habits

Though Monica values being able to work from home when it suits her, she discerns the worrying trend in many of our societies to maximise output. "We are not always improving our lives, happiness, health, or the planet's health with our productivity. To hear that the home is also now a more 'productive space' makes me a bit sad. What kind of productivity is happening here? Is it really the kind we want?"

Many would agree that homes should be nurturing spaces. And nurture is slow. Like in a slow cooker, 'savory stews' from our habits and rituals are getting richer and deeply nourishing our wellbeing. That is, if those habits and rituals inform behaviours we want to see more of.

Aware of the vital tie between our planet's health and our own mental wellbeing, Monica

suggests how we can take simple steps to make our daily actions more sustainable.

"Many behavioural psychologists argue that to make a long-lasting change in a routine or ritual, it helps to connect it to one you already have. Food is often a great entry point. Try plant-based milk in your coffee, vegan lunches on weekdays, or making a weekly meal out of fridge leftovers to reduce food waste."

Monica stresses that although it's a matter of huge importance, it is crucial for people not to feel completely overwhelmed by the climate crisis. "How can we feel that we have any impact as just one individual? That kind of thinking leads to a lack of action, which leads to more anxiety, and the cycle continues. So instead, kick the cycle the



other way. Small actions will give you a boost of satisfaction and can propel you to take bigger actions."

She also advocates that household members should be allowed to decide their own actions. "It leads to a greater excitement! It's so much better than the top-down initiative!" ●

# Happy Hobby

## How to make a kokedama

Learn something new and refresh your space with this beautiful Japanese organic art form

So what is a kokedama? In Japanese the word kokedama means 'moss ball', and it is a style of potting up plants. The roots of the plant are suspended in a mud ball which is then coated with soft green moss. We called upon Amsterdam-based design studio We Smell The Rain to give us a tutorial on how to make one.

Here, the studio's founder Kim Band shows you how it's done.

### Tools and Materials:

- A jug of water
- A bowl
- A mug
- Green sheet moss
- Two types of cotton thread (a thin one and a thicker one)
- Sphagnum sheet moss
- Earth or indoor plant soil
- Plant (high stem preferred)

### How to take care of the kokedama

If your kokedama feels light when picked up – that's the moment to water the plant. Pour some water into a bowl (to about the height of the middle of the root ball) and rest the plant there until it feels heavier. When you take it out, squeeze the ball to remove the excess water.



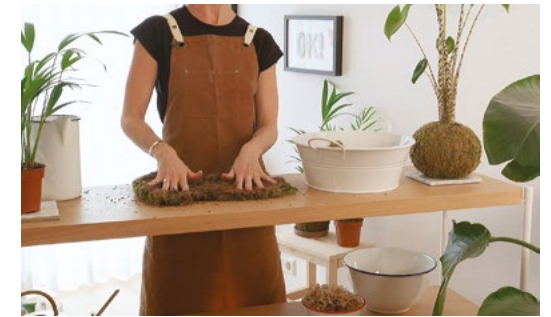
### STEP 1: Turn the mud into a ball

Start by putting a few cups of soil into the bowl according to the plant's pot size, which is a helpful indicator of how big you should make your mud ball. Add some water to moisten the soil, but don't make it extremely thin and wet – you should go for a sticky consistency. Then, take the soil and shape it with your palms. Continue to add soil bit by bit to turn it into a ball.



### STEP 2: Prepare the sheet moss

To prepare the sheet moss, remove all the little sticks or anything else you find stuck in the moss. The best way to do so is by sweeping your fingers over the moss and wriggling the sticks out. Do the same with the other side of the moss. Make sure that you make the moss as flat as possible by pulling extra moss from any uneven areas.



### STEP 3: Make the plant ready

The plant should have dry soil so that you can easily pull it out of the pot and crumble the soil away to leave bare roots. To remove the last of the soil, gently tap the root ball against the side of the bowl you're using to catch the dirt – the soil should fall away itself. Once you have prepared the root base, place the sphagnum moss around it, then secure the moss and the roots together very loosely with the thin cotton thread.



### STEP 4: Put it all together

Place the mud ball directly in the centre of the moss. Cradle the ball, and with your thumb, push in the centre to make a hole where you will place the plant. Place the plant within the hole, folding the roots a bit if you need to. To secure the moss around the ball, start by roughly wrapping the thicker cotton thread around the plant. Leave the tail of the cotton exposed so when you have finished wrapping, you can tightly knot the two tails together. If the base becomes flat, squeeze and shape the ball to make it round. ●



*This tutorial is featured in the IKEA Virtual Greenhouse – an online platform designed to share specially crafted workshops from creative experts in sustainability, design, food, and floristry.*

# Sides of Home: Thriving or

# Stuck Alone

Once our homes had to start housing *all* of our needs, we had to become more intentional about how we used the space to achieve balance. Some people created new routines to support staying productive, while others were looking to carve out more time for activities they enjoy. But it hasn't been easy for everyone. The conversations with people for the IKEA Life at Home Report 2021 reveal there are different sides of every story and different sides to every home.

## My Home Is My Place to Be

Anil, 34, lives in Rosenberg, Texas, USA, with his wife and newborn daughter, and he works in the wedding industry.

**There's a connection between who I am and what my house is.** My home is pretty much my place to be. It's something that I can connect to and bond with – the more I'm in it, the stronger relationship I build with it.

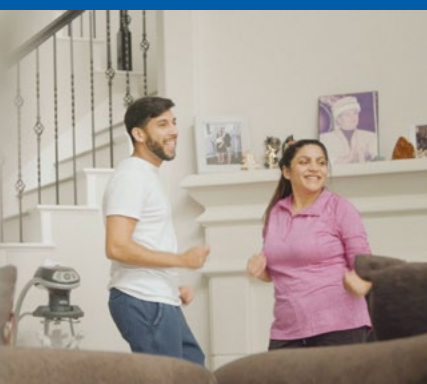
**It hasn't always been like this – I used to like going out, hanging out with my friends, spending a lot of money.** But now pretty much everything that happens outdoors, I can do inside our house and just have an equal amount of fun, if not even more.

**We're not sitting around on the couch with our phones in our hands.** I just feel like I have so much to do, so many things to discover with my wife. We cook, we enjoy board games, we watch shows, we garden,

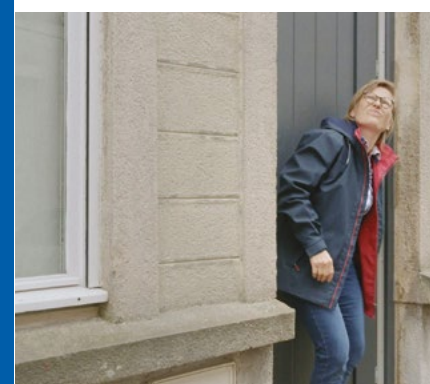
take bubble baths, do face masks. We're always communicating, connecting, talking to each other.

**You feel good about yourself once you're able to accomplish something that you never even thought about doing before.** We cooked a lot, tried new cuisines, explored recipes. It all helps with your wellbeing.

**I feel like our home is where I can form spiritual habits.** I don't go to church as often as I would like. So on Sundays, me and my wife will sit in the living room with our stone collection, and we'll just meditate, take deep breaths. That's our way of reaching out to each other, connecting to each other. It's when we can improve as a couple.



Anil with his wife and daughter



## A House Too Big, A Space Too Small

Sophie, 47, lives by herself in a house in Lille, France, where she works as the head of finance and administration for a local caterer. Her son lives in Montreal, Canada.

**Lockdown made me think about my needs, my house, my desires.** I realised that with my son being away, my house is too big for me alone.

**I didn't develop any new hobbies during that time because I worked a lot.** I would leave at 7am and come home at 8pm, so I didn't feel like doing anything new.

**I missed freedom.** We had to sign a certificate to go out, go shopping, or go to a park for an hour. A certificate to take a walk, go to the pharmacy, or buy some bread. It's hard staying home all by yourself doing nothing. You can't have anyone over. There's no way out.

**The small courtyard I've got where I keep my plants wasn't enough.** Being stuck at home, I

also missed nature. During lockdown in France, you could only go out within 1km from your house, but the park is 1.7km from my house. So no park for me. I used to go there to run, walk, or cycle. It used to be a part of my daily life. And now I couldn't even do that.

**I love the city, but there are walls everywhere.** Lille is very red – the city's made of bricks. The streets are narrow. So I quickly felt like I needed air, trees, and plants.

If I could change something, I would get a house in the country – where I would go during the weekend to garden – and a smaller flat in the city. ●

To see more stories like this, search *IKEA Sides of Home* on Youtube.



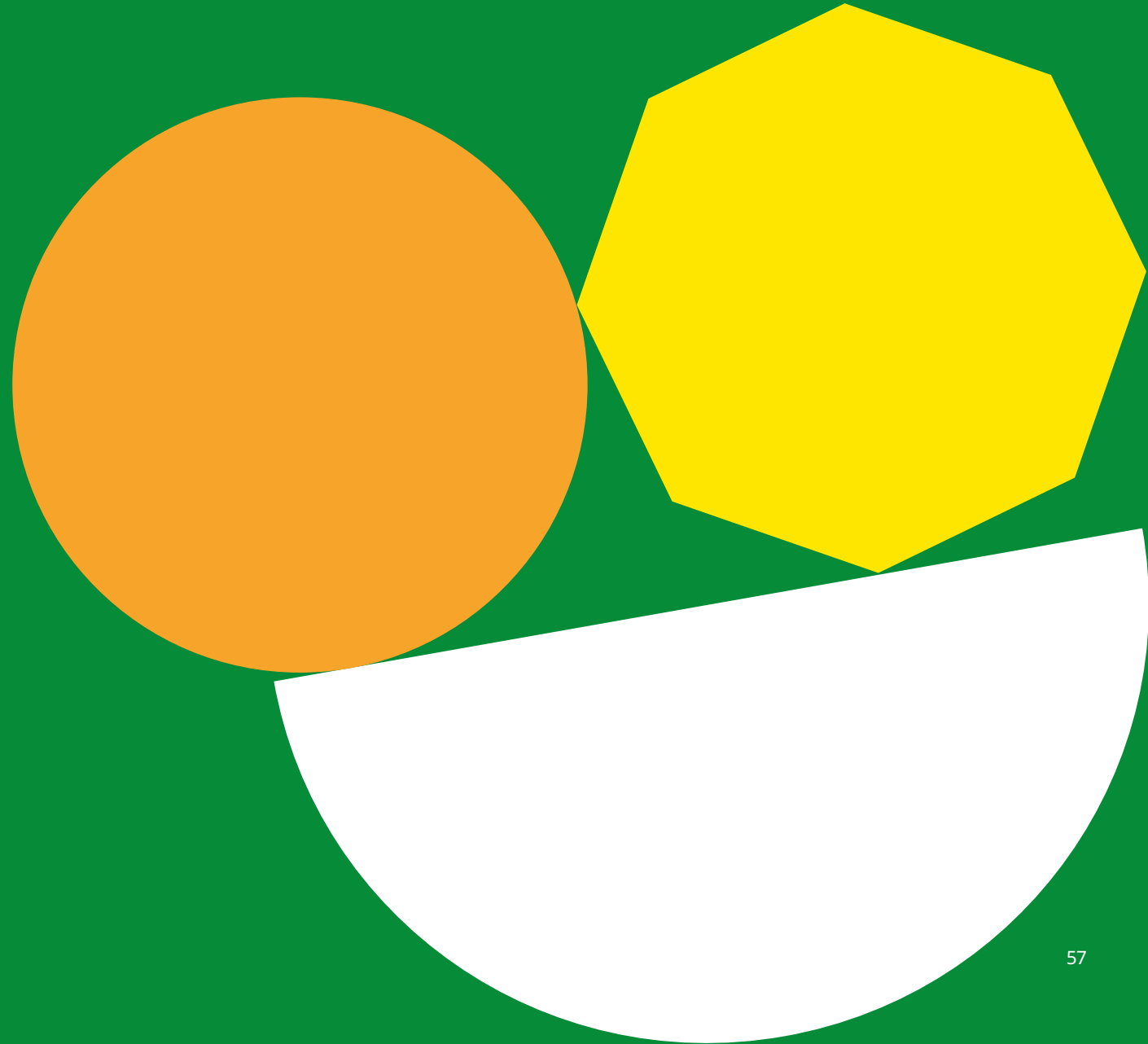
Sophie at her home in Lille

# Relationships

Whether it was growing closer or drifting apart, most of us in the last year took time to face the challenges in our relationships, to talk about them, to change our perspective of who we are and what a better life looks like for us.

It hasn't been just people we've built relationships with at home – when was the last time you really asked a friend about how they were feeling? (Men, we are looking specifically at you here.) Do you recall when you last took the time to look around you, to observe the extraordinary in the ordinary? Give it a go. You might be in for a surprise. ►

## Is home helping or hindering your relationships?



# Man Chat

## An insight into men's interior lives



Award-winning storyteller, filmmaker and comedian, Mark Pagán investigates the role masculinity can play in our friendships – and the spaces we inhabit

Are your friends there for you when life gets tough? Many people turn to their friends to talk about their mental health and wellbeing. But according to the IKEA Life at Home Report 2021, only 36% of men do so compared to 46% of women.

What does this mean? **Mark Pagán**, the creator and host of the podcast *Other Men Need Help*, says exchanges about mental wellbeing happen “between the cracks” as “quiet negotiations” in the interactions men have with each other. His example would be a stereotypical conversation about sport, where two friends talking about game-play analysis would also contain mini-dialogues about a cancer diagnosis, romantic relationships, or issues with a job. And the value of those mini-dialogues is potentially overlooked.

In 2020, I was living in a New York City apartment, maybe larger than average, shared with my girlfriend Caitlin and a recently acquired pet pigeon named Valentina (which is truly an absurd story for another time). When the world felt more open, the 800 square feet (75 square metres) of the apartment felt like an oasis of sorts, more than enough room for our lives to be private or connected after hours outside of our walls.

I was also deep into editing the third season of *Other Men Need Help*. The podcast, which I host and produce, looks at the way men present themselves to the world and asks them to share what's underneath – most often reflected in stories framing their insecurities and various pursuits to build connection with others. Our third season, set to examine friendships between men, had me travelling all over the US, exploring the interior lives of our interviewees. So if there was a question of whether signs of friendship existed in the homes of men,

the answer was yes, it certainly does. Instead, the question should be: how (physically) does it exist in the home? How does someone exist in our spaces without being there? Having spent over 100 hours sitting in the kitchens, offices, and living rooms of men's homes and asking them question after question about their closest friendships prompted a few insights about men's interior lives (and the interior spaces where those lives took place). Notably, two patterns emerged.

When asked to sit stationary and talk openly about their best friends, the men I met tended to fidget with an object within reach. When I asked Kyle why he wouldn't ask Javier, his best friend, to listen to his emotional needs, he slid his iPhone under his hands and began tapping. When Lars started talking about how his friend Neil wouldn't invite him to do certain activities, he took the salt and pepper shakers sitting in front of him and moved them around like bumper cars. ▶

## “When asked to sit stationary and talk openly about their best friends, the men I met tended to fidget with an object within reach.”

Even when I wasn't even prying for information, the bonds between objects and friends were all over the place. With our increasingly super-duper digital world, where memories exist on phones, computers, and social media platforms, I was moved to see that people still hold onto the printed photos and ephemera from *nights on the town with the boys* that archive our relationships with some of our nearest and dearest. From Polaroid hugs resting under magnets on a refrigerator door to an inside joke written on a cocktail napkin, the mementoes of male friendship were part of the accents of any man's home. My favourite moment came in Tim's home, when I pulled a copy of *The Sopranos Sessions* off his bookshelf, literally out of genuine interest as a potential read. He smiled and said, "Yeah, that was a gift from this guy", pointing to his best friend Logan (one of the few times we interviewed two friends at home).

We had about 90% of the season 'in the can' by the time we all began having to stay inside, quarantined with those we shared our homes with. Caitlin and Valentina the pigeon were lovely company for the most part. But after a month together all day, every day, I was desperate for my former outside connections. I missed my friends. I missed my guy friends. I needed a respite from discussing everything with my domestic partner. For me, that respite was Isaac.

Isaac and I had known each other since we were teenagers. I don't want to expose our ages here, but I can say it's been a decades-long friendship. We've seen each other through potentially questionable choices in fashion, romantic partners, and music (we both had a Steely Dan era). He's

one of the closest, longest-lasting, and dearest people in my life.

It started with the prompt to get on the phone. It had been a while, and Isaac suggested a catch-up call. During our chat, I must've mentioned the mountains of movies I was watching in the midst of *Other Men Need Help* editing sessions. As a dad at home with a toddler, his intake of movies that didn't involve some kind of animated singing train was limited.

"I too would like to watch a lot of movies made for adults, Mark". His suggestion: "Let's watch a movie a week and talk about it," which, reading between the lines translated to "PLEASE, GIVE ME SOMETHING ELSE TO WATCH. I'M BEGGING YOU." So together we made an effort to watch something meant for

A 20-year-old mix tape from Isaac, resting in Mark's office



Photos by Jurate Vecerajte



The fridge door, housing a collection of magnets, postcards, and most importantly, photos of friends

## “I was moved to see people still have printed photos.”

During these movie discussions, I would often wander around the bedroom, arranging the socks and clothes on the floor needing a place to hide. As we moved into discussions about our romantic partners, I'd rearrange the office. A typically organised space, I'd slightly adjust the angle of *tchotchkes* [decorative bric-a-brac or ornament] on shelves, a future reminder of Isaac's celebratory words about his wife's career steps.

Sometimes when having a difficult time describing my relationship frustrations, I'd run a finger across speaker dust, leaving a trail of thought ellipses, a fingerprint reminder of reflection to complete by our next call. When our talks would reach a sober point, reflecting on politics, the pandemic, and ageing parents, I'd frequently sit in the wooden chair at a farm table I bought in 2013 that the pandemic had appropriated as my desk. Something about the stiffness encouraged deeper attention. To be honest, I sometimes wouldn't know what to say, my words stuck somewhere in between my heart and my larynx. When that would happen, I'd pick up pencils and move them around like they were bumper cars.

I, too, had found my fidget. When adding my own patterns in with the bouillabaisse of discoveries from two years of reporting, I have a bit more fondness for the unconscious actions we as men exhibit when confronted with the emotional landscape in our deepest friendships. I don't view these actions as fidgets anymore. Like the Polaroids and gifted *Sopranos* books we keep in our homes, I view the fidget as physical punctuation of sorts. A punctuation on the deep bonds our friendships that rest in our bodies and the spaces we inhabit.

Ultimately, my calls with Isaac tapered off as the world began opening up again. My girlfriend, pigeon, and all our stuff moved to a new apartment – a process that still provides discoveries (which is a nice ribbon to put on the Sisyphian task of finding space for your stuff in a now slightly smaller New York City apartment). The *tchotchkes* are unpacked and in new places. The speakers are upright and dusted, the marks of earlier conversations in an earlier home removed.

In an old shoebox, I discovered an old picture of Isaac and me. It's currently resting on my desk, waiting for display. I'm just not sure where to put it yet. ●

Note: Some names have been changed

# The Bigger Picture:

## How a year has affected how and who we love ?

**Fredrik Bengtsson**  
Creative Leader, IKEA  
Retail (Ingka Group)

### The North Star Of Relationships

For Fredrik, in his role as a creative leader, it's important to bring the values held near and dear by IKEA out into the world in ways that are consistent and meaningful. Yet in his capacity as a coach, it's important that people who turn to him identify their values first. "It's about being deeply curious about yourself, finding your North Star, and honouring it in all parts of life."

On learning that relationships with immediate family have improved for many people, Fredrik reacted with, "Wow, that's great!". He sees that "people have been facing challenges in relationships, facing what's not

serving them at home. And voicing what is important. Making improvements."

What would he say to people who are seeking better relationships? "Be yourself, unapologetically. Do things that give you energy, that honour you. Be yourself in words, actions, in the way your home looks. Say what you need, when it serves you and your relationships to others, with kindness. People need to understand who you are, then things will flow a bit easier." As an introvert, Fredrik says he is quick to ask his husband for five minutes of quiet when back from the office. When at home, he also finds different spaces for downtime.

It turns out that having an authentic voice is equally important both for great brands and individuals in showing up in relationships. "If you lose your voice in this world, you're going to get lost yourself." Two paintings in the couple's home tell a peculiar story. Fredrik explains, "When my husband and I moved abroad, he had to

quit his job and take a leap into the unknown. He was battling with an inner judge who kept telling him he should have a job and an income. He called it the 'voices of monsters' and put his experience into stories about creatures keeping him awake at night, which our Amsterdam-based friend Eamonn O'Boyle illustrated with a couple of art pieces. By giving voice to his experience, my husband challenged his inner judge and instead became curious about it."

To Fredrik, understanding what gives energy to relationships is next in importance. "We know that friendships have suffered due to the pandemic. Friendships need energy, need you to lean in." Fredrik sees all change in relationships as an opportunity to inquire deeper into your own reactions and feelings about them, and making informed choices as a result. "It all comes down to understanding the deeper story behind our relationships to people. What's so magical about that friendship? Or will I miss this friend?"



# Relationships

Families have grown closer together, with 42% of people saying their relationships with immediate family have improved over the last 12 months. But other relationships have taken a hit, as one in five people globally say their friendships have suffered over the same period.

IKEA Life at Home Report 2021

### Emma Beddington

Writer, lives in an old house in historic York with her family and pets.

### Too Much Of A Good Thing

We want our closest relationships to be without filter. And so, it is only natural that we need to be in a good relationship with our unfiltered selves. As a writer chronicling the quotidian, Emma realises the lack of time spent alone has rocked the boat for many relationships.

"For lots of us, alone time has been harder to get than ever during the pandemic. I have friends who took up running or gardening, or decided to take sole charge of the household laundry just to get a few precious moments to themselves. When a trip to the bathroom is the only 'me-time' you have, nerves get fraayed!

"There's an English proverb: 'absence makes the heart grow fonder', and I think we've been missing those absences. We aren't meant to spend every waking moment with our nearest and dearest, however much we love them."

Emma writes with her husband's constant phone calls as a working soundtrack as they both now work from home. "I quite like having him around, but I do miss the feeling of an empty house. I've probably spent less than 12 hours alone in the house since COVID began, when previously, I would often have the whole day to myself. It's not that I did anything particularly wild on my own, but I used to eat weird



lunches, do a bit of midday singing, or maybe watch an hour of rubbish TV show on quiet days. We all need time to be our weird, unique, unfiltered selves!" ●



# Finding Faces

## A visit to the home of artist Olaf Breuning



How one artist's ability to find faces in the familiar drew fans from around the world

**Olaf Breuning**, a Swiss-born, New York-based artist, has taken the phenomenon of spotting faces to the next level. Fascinated with his ability to find characters in everyday objects, we approached Olaf to learn more about the art of humour and lightheartedness, as well as how to use our immediate surroundings to create pockets of joy.

**H**ave you ever looked up at the sky only to find yourself being frowned at by a cloud that is passing by? You are not alone. Spotting faces in inanimate objects – like the front of a car, the food you are eating, the facade of a building, or, indeed, different cloud shapes – is a common experience that has been scientifically recognised and is known as 'pareidolia'. Olaf Breuning, whose work has been exhibited widely from the Barbican Centre in London to the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, has turned this phenomenon into a creative project. One glance at his Instagram

profile reveals an extensive collection of faces that have emerged from the most everyday scenes. It's certainly no coincidence that his characters have resonated with people around the world, especially in the wake of the pandemic and induced social isolation. After what feels like one of the darkest years in our recent history, we don't only build relationships with people – some of us may have found ourselves 'in conversation' with the objects around us. Who would have thought that Mrs Frankenpeach, Mr Greeneye, or Mr Pressure would save the day? ►

Olaf standing in front of his house and holding a stick with an umbrella mounted on top. He used it to pick pears from a tree. It's a simple solution for not having a tall ladder. Next to Olaf is a stone sculpture he made



Mrs Pleasonteatme. This berry was spotted by Olaf during one hot summer day in the brutal heat while he was picking strawberries with friends



Sometimes it takes time to find the right angle to capture the face at its best angle. Mrs Yellowme, in particular, needed a pretty long photoshoot to capture her true personality

**It needs to be simple but good**

"I have always been on a mission to establish a line of communication that's approachable and simple for the one looking at my art," Olaf reflects. And not-so-hidden faces have been a key theme ever since he started his art practice. This has proven to be a successful strategy for two reasons: they make his art accessible, and they are somehow "familiar" to us because our brains have a need to identify faces. As humans, we rely heavily on face recognition to understand and communicate, so it only makes sense that facial expressions capture our attention immediately – no matter if it's a real or an illusory face. "Back in 2013 when all my friends joined Instagram, I was very attracted to the visual appearance of it. But I didn't want to show too much of my private life, so I decided to showcase the faces I see all over the place in my everyday life. I didn't want to be a creep who just watches other people without posting anything myself. I thought that

these faces would be good enough for the visual nature of the platform."

While some of Olaf's creations appear accidental, like imperfectly shaped fruits and puddles of rain, others are deliberate and strategically placed, for example, his animated faces created from common household goods. No matter their source, shape, or witty names that always include the titles Mr or Mrs, Olaf's faces have attracted a big community, including renowned institutions such as the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia, The Public Art Fund, and international art fairs such as Art Basel. The ability to see faces everywhere he goes has also led him to work with the LA-based publishing house Silent Sound. Together, they released a book titled *Faces* featuring five hundred unique photographs of personas. Even commercial clients such as Apple and Gucci have found themselves drawn to Olaf's playful world. ▶

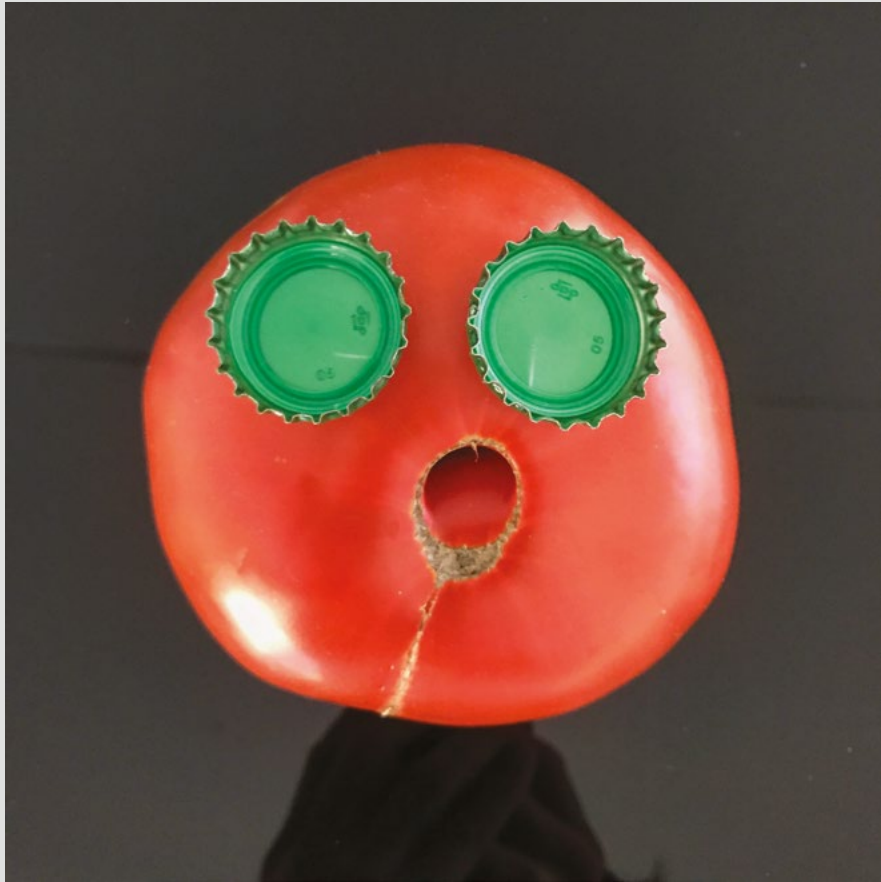


Mr Greenpeaeyes. While cooking, Olaf discovered an old apple, which already had the features of a face. Luckily, he was cooking green peas and simply placed two of them in the empty eye holes

Mrs Cuteandsoft. Bananas are a very good source of potential faces - when cutting them into slices, they often reveal spontaneous hidden features



**"I always see faces in things and I always have my iPhone with me."**



Mrs Greeneye. A face that Olaf made in front of a grocery store in his car while waiting for his family to finish shopping

**“Happiness is something we all needed during the pandemic. I want to inspire people with my art, I want them to see the world differently and, most importantly, with a little distance and humour.”**

### **When life throws you lemons, look them in the face**

It is no wonder that what had started as an artistic experiment to outsmart Instagram’s algorithm has made a profound impact internationally. But no one, not even Olaf, could have foreseen that his collection of faces would one day go hand in hand with the zeitgeist of a whole nation. During the lockdown, his spontaneous bursts of creativity hit home – both literally and figuratively. Characters like Mrs Cuteandsoft, a calm-looking piece of banana, became more than just a silly meme. If anything, Olaf reminded us to find joy in the simple things around us, especially as many of us were forced to spend more time at home. “Happiness is something we all need during the pandemic. I want to inspire people with my art, I want them to see the world differently and, most importantly, with a little distance and humour. Although it seems the world has lost humour these days, who is to blame?” he says.

A closer look at his art reveals that irony and a special sense of humour have been the main drivers of his work since the early nineties. While outwardly playful, Olaf’s work, whether it’s a theatrical installation, a photo collage, a painting, or a documentary, doesn’t shy away from contemporary and weighty topics such as the climate crisis, identity, death, and everyday horror mixed with authenticity and a touch of comedy. Almost like a superpower, he can turn any circumstance, whether it’s dire or not, into a refreshing experience – even a pandemic. “In the beginning, I did not consider my Instagram posts as a part of my “serious” art. But over time, it became its own category with a simple concept. It won’t be difficult for me to continue doing it: I always see faces in things and I always have my iPhone with me.” ►



Mrs Yellowme – a face specifically created for this magazine. Olaf found Mrs Yellowme in the compost, a place where he finds many of his fruity friends

**“I am someone who sees my house as a part of myself, a physical manifestation of who I am.”**



Olaf standing in front of a finished painting in one of his studios that he calls his office. All of his paintings are about the relationship between us and nature

### **Playfulness thrives in carefully curated routines**

“To be honest, I was more than happy to stay in one place and focus on my art and family, even though it feels strange to admit that while so much of the world is suffering,” Olaf says. “Luckily, I was used to solitude before Covid-19 hit the world. I don’t need anyone except myself at my studio, and for the moment, I am still happy to spend time here. I always worked where I lived, and I guess the pandemic was not a new experience for artists in terms of working alone for most of the time. It’s a different experience for someone who leaves the house each morning to go to work. That being said, I am excited to be able to travel again soon – just a little,” he smiles.

Five years ago, he moved to a mid-century house in Upstate New York, and he hasn’t regretted this decision. While cities turned into eerie places during the height of the pandemic, Olaf, his wife Makiko, and his three-year-old daughter Aka enjoyed mundane routines close to nature. To find creative focus and to establish balance and wellbeing, every step between waking up at exactly 6:13am to prepare a Japanese breakfast and going to bed at 10:30pm is carefully curated. “It sounds really boring but somehow this simple routine is very nice. Of course, we also see friends at night or go outside to avoid feeling like being stuck in the longest *Groundhog Day*.” ▶

Mr Icleanuplater. The bucket was sitting in the corner just waiting for Olaf to put two empty beer bottles in it. A new mop face was born





Olaf, relaxing after work on his couch with his daughter Aka, who always sits on Olaf while he is resting and demands he tell her a story

Interview by Monique Schröder, photos by Sergiy Barчук, faces by Olaf Breuning

**“Home should be a constant love affair. A cosy nest where good energies reside.”**

#### **Distributing joy into all corners of the home**

But life at home is more than just simple schedules for Olaf. “Home should be a constant love affair. A cosy nest where good energies reside. A place that provides warmth and acts as a shelter in this crazy world, where problems can be reduced to sitting on the couch and drinking a glass of wine or cooking a nice meal in the kitchen.” For someone who spends his life optimising every minute of the day, it is only natural to apply the same method when personalising the home with furniture and objects. For him it’s not about the picture-perfect set-up. He finds balance in moving around the house, which is why he created many ‘small pockets of joy’ that cater to his different needs. “I always liked different rooms or tables for different tasks. I have a drawing table, a work table, an archive table, a mushroom table to clean mushrooms, and many more workstations. I also have two studios:

one is for painting only and the other one is an office with an archive.”

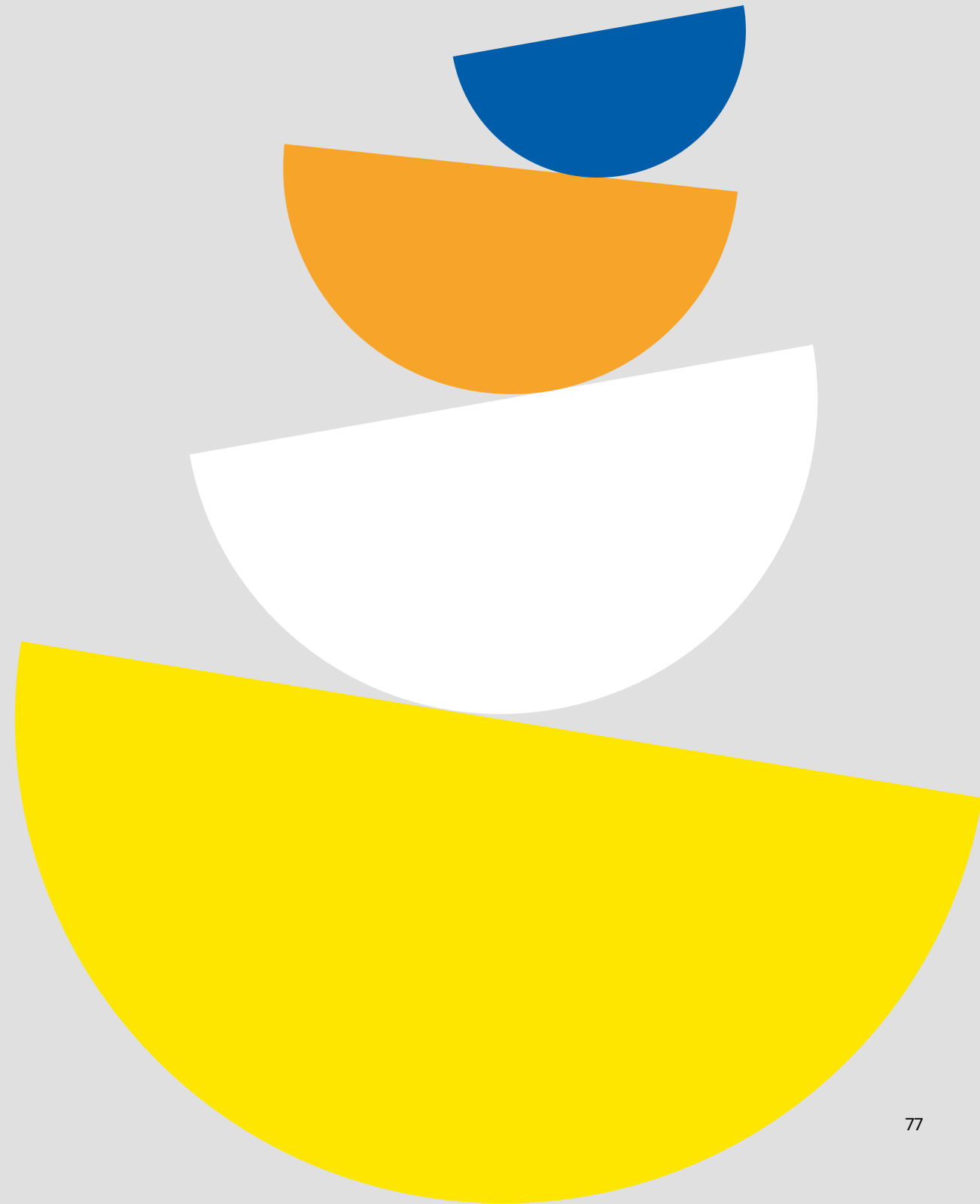
Olaf’s concept of home hasn’t changed during the past 12 months, but he now fully embraces the daily order of things with an almost meditative mindset. With so much time spent at home, he has grown even more attached to his house: “I am someone who sees my house as a part of myself, a physical manifestation of who I am,” he admits. Not travelling and staying put for such a long time made him sensitive to minor things that wouldn’t be obvious otherwise, like cracks in the marble and the squeaking sounds of doors. “These strange times forced us to finally face habits that were already on the horizon. On a positive note, people have learned to be modest and productive. And I am so happy to have exchanged the city jungle with a real forest jungle.” ●

# Community

How much does your community do for your wellbeing?

In streets or on screens, people have been making an effort to stay connected.

But being a newbie in any kind of community can be intimidating. Over the next pages, we shine a light on the many different ways that people adapt to their environment, no matter if they are game-obsessed teenagers or eternally optimistic octogenarians. ▶



# Home Is Near the Coffee Shop

## Exploring the fear of fitting in



Much to their surprise, writer and author Jamie Windust discovers a new sense of belonging in their neighbourhood

**Jamie Windust**, a nonbinary author, editor and presenter living in London, hates moving house. But when they had to, moving a mere mile up the road allowed them to overcome their preconceived notions about not fitting into a community. In fact, they discovered new promise in this same neighbourhood – that of keeping them balanced and grounded. Or as Jamie asks rhetorically, if you can't keep it local and feel connected, then where *can* you feel connected?

The first thing that I like to say to people when I meet them is, “Hi, I’m Jamie Windust, style icon, model, and writer, and one of my most hated activities is moving house.” It’s a real crowd pleaser. It’s always good to be upfront, isn’t it? I can’t be the only one who hates it. The boxes, the deconstruction of life. The fact that you have to be efficient because otherwise you’re screwed: you know you’ll need a cup of tea, but the tea bags are in a box that’s underneath an old collection of magazines you’re keeping ‘just in case’ you want to put them on the new coffee table. Moving is a task that was created to show just how inept certain human beings can be.

But once I’ve decided what socks to bring with me to my new abode, I remember what moving house actually means. It’s a change of scenery, yes, but also the beginning of a new time period in life. Fine, I’m being dramatic, but for me, moving house has always signified more

than just geographical change. In July of 2020, as the world decided whether or not it was open to the idea of getting ‘back to normal’, I moved house and was venturing out for the first time. I was living alone. This was it. This was my sitcom moment! During university and subsequently in those adrift years post-degree, I’d lived with the same people. From flat to flat, to a house to a flat, back to a house, we moved around the same small town in Surrey, in South East England, for three years. Now, after leaving Surrey and moving to South West London, we’d all decided to go our different ways. My path was a lonesome one, and I knew I’d need comfort: an environment that I felt at ease in and that was in my local area. I knew that if I moved out on my own and changed area, it would be too much for me to manage. I’d feel lost. Untethered. I needed something to make me feel safe and connected, so I moved a mere mile up the road. Change, but familiar change. ►



**“I’d always seen my neighbourhood as something I never really felt connected to. All it took was a global pandemic to make me realise that I only had to give them a chance.”**

I’d lived in leafy South West London for two years and it had served me well, allowing me to build a ritual of casual smiles and rushed ‘good mornings’ as I bobbed around its sunny pavements. But when I moved out, the network of friendly strangers and coffee shop baristas took on new meaning. My home had changed, yet my surroundings outside of my new four walls remained the same. They contained new promise and more power than I’ve ever realised. They were the things that had once been unimportant yet now kept me sane and grounded as I ventured into my new etching of life.

Living alone can be (shock! horror!) lonely. Especially as the pandemic-swept world re-opened. I wasn’t a fan of alcohol or football, so the majority of the ‘re-openings’ were useless to my social calendar, and I remained in my lockdown routine. However, seeing the same people every day from my local neighbourhood took on new meaning. Seeing the smiley coffee lovers in the queue at my local coffee shop was like walking into my family home when I would go back for a surprise visit. It took on the same resonance. A feeling of familiarity. A warmth. It was like the smell of a roast dinner on a Sunday at your gran’s house, but this time in a queue of South Londoners wanting a flat white on a Tuesday morning.

I’d always seen my neighbourhood as something I never really felt connected to. Yes, I lived there and I paid council tax and I put the bins out if I really had to, but moving out on my own at a time when all we had was our local and digital

communities meant that I was proved wrong. I had presumed I wasn’t allowed to be a part of it because of my identity or because of the way I looked. From concerned looks from mothers as they took their kids to school, to my fear of walking home at night, to the builders down the road who would always have too much to say as I made my way to the tube. It was scary to be authentic and eccentric in a place that you’ve never lived in before. It all boiled down to a fear of the unknown. What was going to happen in this new, unfamiliar environment? But what dispelled that fear is taking the unknown and getting to know it; popping the fear bubble.

This fear had all been in my head. I had presumed that me and the people around me would have nothing in common, or that they’d think I was slightly odd. All it took was a global pandemic to make me realise that I only had to give them a chance. Sad really, but I’m glad it did because it showed me that the world is a kind place once I lead with kindness rather than with fear.

Now, it’s been nearly 18 months living on my own, and I am experiencing ‘place’ like I never have before. I feel content with walking in the same triangle most days, listening to the radio that kept me company in lockdown as I go. From home, to coffee, to town, to the park, to home (ok, that’s me walking in a square isn’t it really, but allow me the metaphor). My favourite hub of connectivity has to be my local coffee shop. (It’s called Wacka, which I would recommend saying to yourself in the mirror and watching what shapes your face makes as a result.)



Photos by Jamie Windust (self-portraits)

Coffee break! Jamie plans the day ahead

Living in a fast-paced world, in a fast-paced way of work surrounded by constant news and energy, it can feel like we have to uproot ourselves every year just so that we can be seen by others to be on the move. We don’t want to be seen as stagnant. But for me, I feel at ease being able to appreciate that home is comfortable and friendly, and if I’ve found that in my leafy green suburb with my cosy baristas and lines of trees, then I don’t need to leave. I deserve calmness and warmth, and it’s ok to remain within that. Never say never, though! If I do get the old boxes out again and start packing up my life, I’ll make sure that I take my new neighbourhood out for a test drive first. See if it gives me that warmth. See whether it feels the same as walking home with a cup of tea in the sunny September chill. Whether or not I fancy the local barista. Whether or not I can lose myself in the smiles of the neighbours and feel snug knowing that this could be my new home. It’s all about being in touch with myself and my feelings. If I like it, and it feels like it could be home, then there’s only one way to find out if I’m right.

I had once lived thinking that staying home and staying local meant you were boring or dull. Why would you want to stay in your local area when there’s a whole city to explore? But what the past year has taught me is that if you can’t keep it local and keep it within your own neighbourhood and feel connected, whole and happy, then where can you feel connected? I realised I don’t need the hustle and bustle of Soho or Brick Lane all the time to feel connected to my city. Sometimes all it takes is a ten-minute walk to pick up a coffee and a slice of cake on a Saturday afternoon, with the radio on in my ears and the knowledge that I’m not fearful of fitting in anymore. I have found my lane, my people, my coffee shops, my annoying dogs, my local buskers, my familiar waves and awkward glances. My community of like-minded people, all just wanting to fit in. ●

In lockdown it went from wintry queues outside, two by two as if we were embarking on the Ark, to slowly opening up and being able to realise the full potential of this little caffeinated hotspot. It revealed its cosiness even with the restrictions that it had to follow for our safety. I now work outside this coffee shop with my laptop most days, having become a regular of sorts. It’s a cosy feeling, finding a place to put down roots. Whatever I’m feeling, or whatever day I’ve had, I can decamp to my seat outside Wacka and feel comfortable in the familiarity.

**“My path was a lonesome one, and I knew I’d need comfort: an environment that I felt at ease in.”**

My sense of home has changed in the best way possible. I feel tethered to this community and this space. Not in a way that feels tight or restrictive, but in a way that feels warm. I thought recently about re-locating and genuinely didn’t want to move too far away from the coffee shop and its friendly milk wizards. I know it may feel reductive, but ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’

# Sides of Home: Together or Apart

## Neighbours And Friends For Life

**Abdul, 25, lives with relatives in Camden, London. He manages a local men's football team.**

**For me personally, the last 18 months have probably been the hardest of my life.** The pandemic has made it difficult for everyone. Firstly, the football stopped. So, we stopped seeing our mates and that was a big block because whenever I was struggling with things in life, I'd have football and that would take everything away, even if for a moment.

**We wanted to create a safe space for other people and ourselves.** I got my own football community with a few friends. We give training sessions to young people, and we have a men's team, which I manage. The idea is to unite everyone, and it's open for everyone.

**It's been quite sad because there's been a few losses within my apartment building.** Over

the last six months, my next-door neighbour's mum passed away because of Covid-19. And then one of our neighbours upstairs too, their mum passed away as well. Also, one of our close friends passed. And then my nan. We all experienced something similar. So, it was nice to be able to speak to each other, be there for each other.

**It's hard to let people in, but when you do, it feels good because you feel like you've made yourself vulnerable to someone else.** And I'm sure that during the lockdown I've created strong bonds with people around me. We'll be friends for a lifetime. It's nice to know that they're not too far. So, if anything ever goes wrong in life or you need to celebrate, you don't have to drive hours to see them.



Abdul with his family and friends



## I Needed Connection To The World

**Oscar, 22, lives in Shanghai, China. He is a student at Newcastle University in the UK, but due to the pandemic he has been studying remotely.**

**I call myself a graduate student of 'the Zoom University'.** Even though I adapted over time, remote studying is difficult. I look forward to my new life in the future when I really arrive in the UK, begin a new chapter, and meet all the people I haven't met.

**During this period, I felt really withdrawn.** Sometimes I even worried about becoming too lonely. Yes, the internet helps me stay connected. It is possible to use the internet to make you feel that you are still connected to the world. For example, when everyone is watching a live broadcast, you feel that these people are connected in some way, even though you don't know who they are. But if it's gone, I feel broken and that I've lost all contact with the outside world.

The IKEA Life at Home Report 2021 reveals that a whopping 62% of people felt better from a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood. But not everyone was creating bonds in houses and their immediate environment. Many felt seen, heard, or understood by or were sharing their interests with people on the other side of a screen.

**Work, study, entertainment, and rest are completely blurred.** In the past I would go to different places to do different things. For example, you may work in the office, study in the library, or have entertainment at home or outside in public places. Now, due to the pandemic, you have to do everything in the same space. In this case, I feel that my body does not know what I am doing.

**My home would often feel like a prison because I wouldn't see anyone.** I missed seeing different people even through the window, but what I see now is just a very tall building on the opposite side. Now, no one is even walking on the road and the little green spaces are empty.

*To see more stories like this, search IKEA Sides of Home on Youtube.*



Oscar at his home in Shanghai

# 100 Years Young

## The Conviviality of Ikaria



Photographer and writer Eftihia Stefanidi explores the Greek island where the locals seem to live forever

Off the coast of Ikaria, the legendary Icarus attempted to fly to the sun and plunged shortly after to an early death into the inky blue Aegean. He was one of the unlucky few, for islanders here are the most likely to live to the age of 100 in all of Europe. The 'island of longevity' has long been awarded 'Blue Zone' status for its residents with youthful complexions and an unerring zest for life. The reason for the number of centenarians on Ikaria has often been credited to a diet rich in legumes and low on stimulants, like coffee, but a weekend rubbing shoulders with the locals reveals that there might be more to living a longer life than eating lentils.

**“On this island of longevity the residents have an unerring zest for life.”**

Driving around winding coastal bends, you get a sense of the wild energy of the island. Rugged mountains jut into romantic wisps of cloud at their peak, and crashing waves powered by the Aegean's famous northern wind, the *meltemi*, lap

at white sand beaches. Pine-surrounded villages like Raches thrive with activity. Locals play backgammon with gusto for hours under the dappled shade. In verdant valleys, shepherds herd goats, and workers gather the purple bounty of vineyards. Ikaria is an island very much alive, in spite of its reputation for its islanders' laid-back way of life. By night, wild local festivals (*panygiria*) see traditional stone villages pulse with the thrum of a drum, the heart-whipping sounds of the violin, and dancing. Endless dancing.

Yes, a healthy diet does help the heart clock another year but the clink of a wine glass, dinners with loved ones, a round of backgammon with a friend – Ikarians insist it is these most vital elements of the human experience that keep them going. Conviviality is the Ikarian way. At a *kafeneion* in Vrakades, friends drift in and out over the course of a day, nursing a silty Greek coffee for hours. After feeding the goats, before preparing lunch, they get together. Meeting up with friends here is not a date or an entry in a diary. Like everything else in Ikaria, it is something to be savoured, appreciated, valued. They take time simply for the sake of taking time, and life simply goes on. ▶

Georgkakis in his porch at Koudoumas village on a foggy morning. With a kind smile, he poured Greek coffee as we both gazed ahead in the landscape of Agios Kyrikos



Catch of the day



Sofia's [pictured on the previous page] *Magirio*, a traditional Ikarian dish with string beans, potatoes, peppers, corn and fresh tomato sauce. All home grown ingredients picked freshly from Sofia's land that morning and paired with the local red wine. A priceless lunch

View from the house of Greek painter and sculptor Vangelis Rinas, born in Samos but raised in Ikaria. The gorgeous marble piece in the house's exterior overlooks Fournoi-archipelago, a cluster of tranquil rocky islands known for fishing



A quintessentially Greek sight: a table resting under a tree where local food is about to be served, with local olive oil aplenty. The taverna of Leonidas in Faros smells of sea salt and pine trees



Ikaria's peculiar geological and tectonic structure has blessed it with precious geothermal springs. Outdoor natural hydrotherapy is a popular activity in the island, especially with the locals

# The Bigger Picture:

Are we becoming better neighbours?

**Marine Tanguy**  
Founder and CEO  
of MTArt Agency  
for artists

## Art Nurtures Wellbeing In The Neighbourhood



It was her everyday walks that inspired more ideas for new public art projects, a way to revive different areas and engage with local communities. Some were designed as a response to lockdown, for example, reusing shop windows to display art. "The year-long exhibition by our artist Delphine Diallo, which discussed the role of women within the urban space, was particularly meaningful in writing a new story for Regent Street, one of inclusion and local life."

When MTArt collected data on two of its earlier public art initiatives, the results were especially encouraging, with 84% of the sample audience saying that seeing art regularly in public spaces would increase their wellbeing. "As people, we love a good story. We want to take part in multiple stories in places where we live, work, or travel – and we want those stories to represent us and our values. Public art in neighbourhoods helps to remind people of the stories we are creating all together."

**M**arine grew up on Île de Ré, a small island in France, where she was used to walking in the village or by the seaside. Now living in London, she cycles and walks everywhere. "I find it soothing, and it informs my knowledge of the place I live in. This is the only way to pick up on changes within a neighbourhood."

# Community

73% of people around the world say they have spent more time in their neighbourhoods in the last 12 months. 62% say their mental wellbeing has benefitted from having a sense of belonging in their local area.

IKEA Life at Home Report 2021

**Mercedes Gutiérrez Álvarez**  
Head of Social Impact and  
Community Engagement,  
IKEA Retail (Ingka Group)

## Communities Can Be Prosperous

**"B**etter homes create better lives, but too many people are experiencing poverty and social exclusion in our communities," Mercedes says. She has been leading the IKEA Retail agenda for how the company supports and connects with the communities around its stores. "Today we are present in 392 local neighbourhoods in 32 countries. By 2030 we are committed to creating a positive impact for everyone across the value chain and beyond. This includes our co-workers, workers of our suppliers and business partners and the local neighbourhoods where we are present. We can create circles of prosperity with communities. When those neighbourhoods thrive, we thrive too."

After years of, in Mercedes' words, "doing many great things, but with a short-term impact", IKEA, through its new IKEA x Neighbourhoods initiative, is prioritising three movements through to the year 2030 to support the most vulnerable communities: increasing access to better homes, opening pathways to decent work, and enabling as many people as possible to participate.

Engaging in decent job creation in at-risk communities is an objective that has the ability to rewrite the future scenario for many individuals. As Mercedes says, "We have supported 802 refugees and asylum seekers to improve their employability and language skills; 60% of them got a job at IKEA after the training



phase. We have also developed a 'micro-hub' concept as part of our last-mile value chain in cooperation with social entrepreneurs. Our first pilot project in Paris is with a local enterprise, Carton Plein, that helps people experiencing homelessness and social exclusion to integrate back into society with coaching, training, and employment, while offering a great service to our customers who can collect their IKEA products closer to their homes." ●

# Home, Virtually

## Finding a digital tribe



Illustrations by Steponidas Liepsna

Two stories of how, for some people, online gaming has paved the way for a new sense of community

**Mel Brodie**, a writer and editor who lives in London, never really felt comfortable with how obsessed her son was with playing in virtual worlds on his Xbox, until the real world around all of us changed for good

As the mother of a teenage boy, the amount of permitted gaming time has been a much-debated issue in our house. Minecraft was the original gateway game, with me thinking it was notionally educational, or at least requiring some right-brain engagement as you form your own community, design buildings, keep livestock alive and work with the ‘villagers’.

FIFA then became a new favourite, partly because, like Minecraft, you can also choose to play it alone or across platforms with friends. As my son got a little older, the ‘shoot ‘em ups’ became more alluring, and he inevitably got swept away by the phenomenon of Fortnite, the premise of which is kill or be killed. Last man standing wins.

Pocket money was soon spent buying ‘skins’; outfits your character or avatar would be wearing to parachute into battle. To me it literally seemed like money for nothing, but there was social currency in this. It mattered. As did winning. The decibel levels soared as shrieking (and the occasional expletive that I hadn’t even realised he knew) ricocheted around the house. I started to google ‘how to soundproof a room’.

Friction over stopping playing began to punctuate our daily routine. The games are live, so you can’t pause mid-way through. So, even if dinner is ready, why would you stop? Because this might just be the one you win... Strict

rules on time and behaviour were imposed and all seemed fine. Until suddenly we couldn’t leave our homes, and I found myself being out-negotiated by a 13-year-old about why the gaming world was the only way he could stay in touch with his friends and socialise. When worrying he wasn’t getting out and about enough in our local community, it dawned on me that this *was* his new community.

Screen limitation boundaries evaporated as parents across the globe capitulated, both to buy themselves a couple of hours of time, and also because there really was no argument for not allowing this off-world connection. Happy chatting and much animated discussion of battle tactics ensued. For hours.

**“There was social currency in this. It mattered.”**

But with so much freedom to be had online, maybe my son’s teenage appetite for being glued to a controller has been partially sated. Once the world opened up again, his joy of being able to hang out in someone’s actual house was palpable. And now when a gaggle of teenagers are all in my home, only rarely do they resort to gaming. But with them all now a year older, more noisy and more swear-y, I’ve decided to save that bookmark on sound-proofing. ▶

### DID YOU KNOW...

- 350 million people play Fortnite each month, and over 126 million play Minecraft
- Minecraft sales reached over 600 million copies, with 400 million sold in China
- Up to 54% of boys aged 3-12 play Minecraft compared to 32% of girls
- Fortnite generated \$5.1 billion revenue in 2020

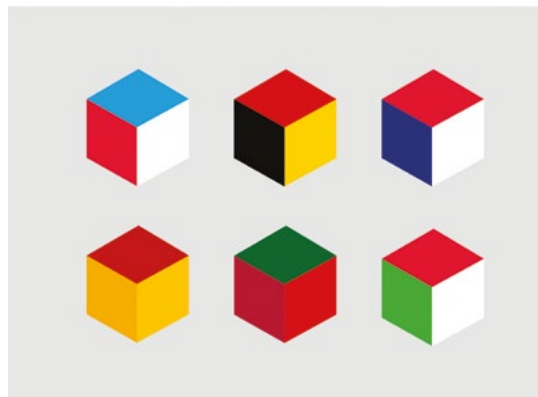
**Caroline Whiteley** is a German-American writer and editor based in Berlin. Her work explores the intersections of music, fashion, art, and digital culture

**G**rowing up in the early 2000s, gaming always felt outside my reach, off-limits for girls. In high school, my male peers would gather around someone's house on weekends, entering an imaginary world connected via Ethernet cable through a LAN port. At the time, first-person shooter games were particularly popular at these LAN parties, so much so that the state of Bavaria banned LAN parties in school buildings, out of fear that they were a breeding ground for the type of toxic masculinity that would ultimately lead to violence among young people.

**“The internet provides an opportunity to break free from geographical location and perceived gender roles.”**

Flash forward about a decade later, and a new game entered the world that would flip the notion of gaming's harmful qualities on its head, harkening back to a time when the internet was a space of boundless experimentation and play: Minecraft. The game's sandbox nature allows players to build worlds using 3D blocks on infinite terrain, and in multiplayer mode, they can interact and communicate with each other in a shared world. These communal online spaces became particularly valuable in the pandemic, where physical interaction was limited to individual households.

Minecraft became a popular hosting site for events that couldn't take place offline. Virtual clubs, where digital revellers could congregate and see their favourite artists perform live within the game, existed before the pandemic, but clubs like Club Matryoshka, created by a Filipino Minecraft community called Chodes Craft, reached new audiences around the world. While digital parties were freed from the constraint of locations, the use of avatars offers players the opportunity to inhabit an infinite range of bodies and identities. In this sense, the gaming community even became a liberating space reclaimed by queer, nonbinary, and disabled people. During times of social distancing, the virtual worlds created in Minecraft became a lifeline for folks seeking communion. Still, as we enter into a new post-lockdown era, the communities forged online remain. The internet provides an opportunity to break free from geographical location and perceived gender roles. Now that we're able to congregate in IRL spaces with each other again, the LAN party is now a participatory space made for everyone. ●

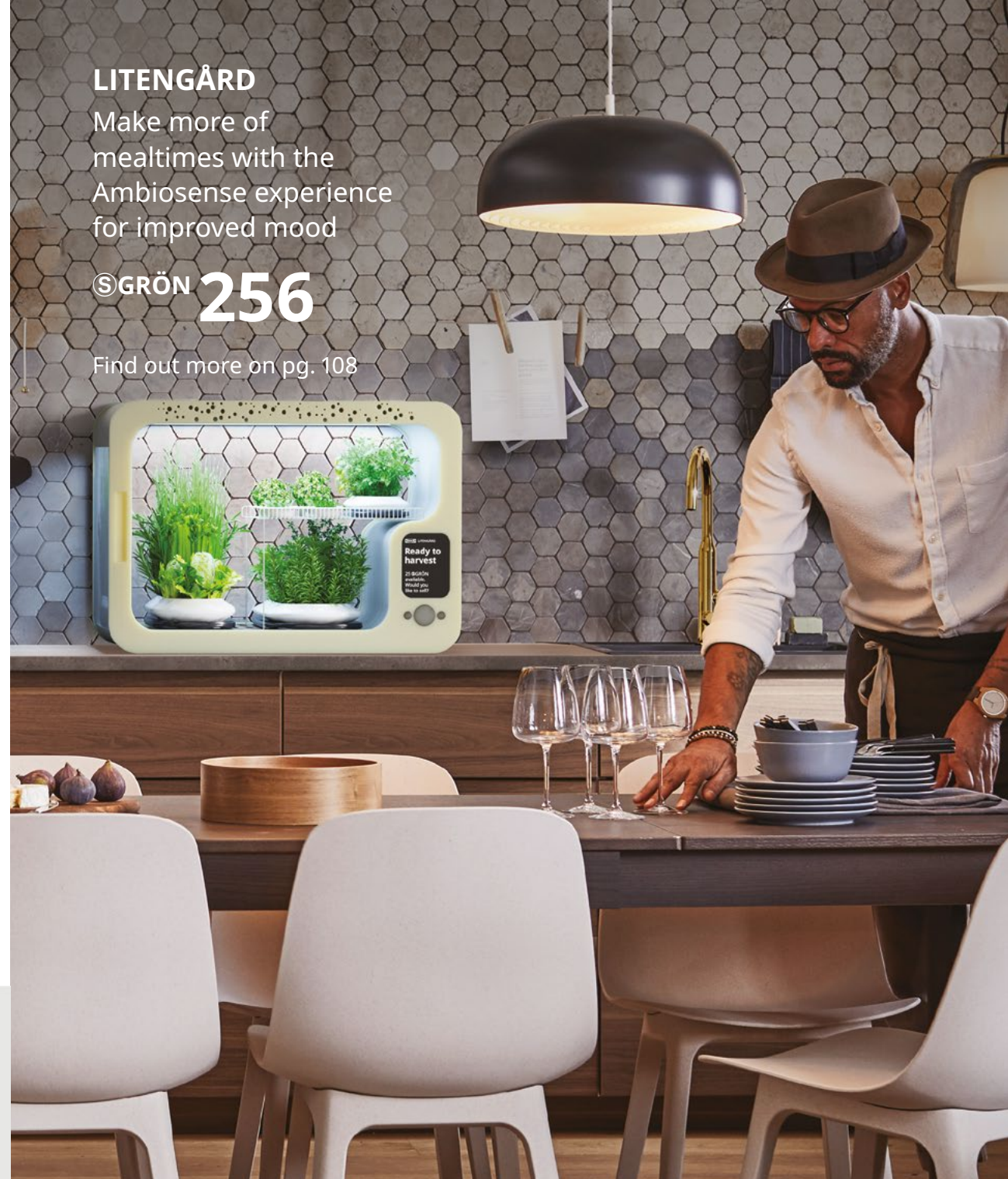


## LITENGÅRD

Make more of mealtimes with the Ambiosense experience for improved mood

GRÖN 256

Find out more on pg. 108



**Farm. From home.**





# Future

We can't predict what will or will not be there in the future, or what the world will look like. What will our homes look like? And will our attitudes towards them and the planet we live on remain the same? When we think of a healthy, happier future for both ourselves

and the planet, we are all in a position to make a change, make a difference. In the next few pages we envisage what happens when we let our kids take responsibility (yes, a scary thought!), and look at the optimistic possibilities for what's around the corner. ▶



# Home

Ways that we can get closer to our dream life at home



# Life

Why adults must never forget the magic of childhood

# Lessons

**Magnus Thuvesson** is a competence development leader for topics related to children at IKEA Range & Supply. He runs a regular “Kids’ Panel” as a way to collaborate with children of all ages in the design of various IKEA products.

From hiding toys in wardrobes to watching his daughter brush her teeth with soda, Magnus tells us about some of the many things he’s learned about kids, their mental health and the importance of play – not just for them but for us grown ups, too. ▶



Child's play with  
Magnus Thuvesson

Magnus and his panda companion - taken by Magnus



# 01

People are always impressed when I say that we collaborate with children, but it's just basic design principles.

You have to start with the user, and in our case the user is a child. When you ask them for their views on life it doesn't take much to realise that they have very different kinds of needs. Of course, it's more challenging in many ways – we have to speak to them in a language we have maybe forgotten as adults – but it's also a lot more fun.

# 02

It's not just toys – you need to collaborate with kids to make wardrobes, too. And all kinds of furniture in the home.

When we were designing SMÅSTAD, we collaborated with three-year-olds. We put soft toys inside the wardrobe to see how far they could reach, and we played a bit of hide-and-seek. That way we understood things from a child's perspective, like the fact that a messy room isn't a problem for a kid most of the time – it's only a problem for an adult.



# 03

If you forget about mental wellbeing then we end up treating kids like robots.

There is lots of discussion about increasing awareness of movement and healthy eating, but it's not a question of awareness – kids already know. It just adds more pressure on top of things like school work. We mustn't forget that the right to education is one of the Articles in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, but so is the right to play. And sometimes these rights can compete. If we slip into thinking that kids just need 'charging' with the right food and the right amount of movement, then we forget that children have mental health needs too. ▶

# 04

## We fixate on ages in children.

We tend to explain everything they do by their age, and what's 'normal' or within range for that year group. Why do we need it to be normal? I really dislike that word! If I'm having a problem, I don't Google what's normal for a 42-year-old. If someone's late for a meeting, they don't say it's because they're 23.



# 05

## As adults, we get play fundamentally wrong.

I see two common mistakes. The first is that we dismiss play entirely by telling children to stop playing around – this overlooks the fact that play is a natural way of learning and developing, and so I suspect that adults who stop playing are also not developing. The second mistake is that play becomes too purpose-driven – the idea that you need to play in order to learn maths, or something. The magic of play happens only when you play for the sake of it. That's when all the good things take place.

# 06

## I'm really proud of how working with kids has made our children's range so much more relevant for young people.

When we designed the lighting range, for example, we asked kids what they wanted and used that to brief our designers, then we got the kids to pick their favourite designs. So the lights you can find in stores today in the children's range, like the PELARBOJ pencil mood light, are a direct result of that collaboration. ▶





## 07

When we talk about children but not with them, we make them magical.

It means we fall into the habit of believing that 'kids know what's best for themselves' rather than seeing them as whole and imperfect people. I was in a meeting with my daughter when someone said that kids know best, at which point my toddler dipped a toothbrush she was waving around into a glass of soda and started brushing her teeth. Kids don't always know what's best for them, but it's our responsibility to listen either way.

## 08

Kids with their phones are here to stay.

The adult world treats it as a problem, but it's clear that kids love their devices. We know there's a shift towards more sedentary lifestyles when kids use tech, but it's all about balance. So I would also like to have a more practical view on it – I think that time spent online comes with the same mix of opportunities and risks as time doing other kinds of activities in the real world, from getting active to meeting new people. So it's worth considering that if we currently stay with our kids while they play in the park, maybe we should also stay with them while they play online.



Photos copyright Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

## 09

I'm excited about the movement I see happening among young people.

From the work we do, I can see that kids are really, really worried about the future. But they're active and putting pressure on global leaders. As a big company, it's our job to pay attention to what they have to say about the climate. And about wardrobes too.



Future home

## 10

I've learned so much from working with kids.

But I'm also a parent, and I can tell you that no one is perfect. ●

*As told to Katie McCrory.*

# The Bigger Picture:

**How will we create happy homes for the future?**

**Ludvig Liljeqvist**  
Global Sustainability Insights and Innovation Leader, IKEA Retail (Ingka Group)

## In The Future We Will Design With Nature

**"T**he moment humans leave, nature will come back to cities. It will break the concrete and rewild our urban spaces," Ludvig says. Although we've built our cities "by fighting nature, we cannot 'safe-proof' them against extreme weather events." Ludvig believes the day will come when we collectively stop fighting

nature and instead embrace it. And that day will create a paradigm shift in the way we approach urban living. "We need to invite nature in. Learn from it and design with it."

Learning that urban life has become less important and that people want to live in homes that are cleaner, greener, and airier, Ludvig feels optimistic. In this trend he sees the possible manifestation of a solarpunk future, which envisions what a sustainable civilization looks like, living in harmony with nature. It has inspired a lot of Ludvig's work. Working with insights and foresight, he is on a mission to create a "radically optimistic people- and planet-positive future." In the volatile and uncertain world that we live in, sustaining a positive future vision requires radical collective imagination and action.

The 2021 Climate Action Research, on which Ludvig has also been working, indicates

that 87% of people surveyed are willing to take action to tackle climate change. This willingness, together with a positive vision of the future, may shift us into acting more like nature – "giving back more than we take. That suggests a future that is regenerative."

In this future, humans are part of co-developing planetary systems, integral urban systems will need to become circular and regenerative by design. "Decentralised energy production, water supply networks, food production and distribution: essentially we will need to organise ourselves more locally, to live in smaller communities."

An adventurer and a believer that "life gets just better", as the father of "three small teachers", he believes that human imagination, storytelling, have helped humans make leaps in the past towards a better future and will help do so for future generations.



# Future Home

The ideal home has become cleaner, greener, and airier. Urban life and commuting distances are less important than they were. In fact, 31% of people say it's now more important to live closer to family and friends. People are thinking about a healthier, happier future – for themselves, their families, and the world around them.

IKEA Life at Home Report 2021

**Heidi Toivonen**  
Consumer and Customer Insights Manager, IKEA Retail Finland

## For Finns, Traditional Living Is The Way Forward

**"T**his year's report confirmed my view that people in Finland really build homes for *themselves* and our wishes for our future living are actually very traditional," says Heidi. Having more space as well as being closer to nature and to their families and communities is how Finns lived in the past. And they still maintain their own space – the average floor area per person has grown every year, but in 2020 over 45% of households in Finland were one-person only. "What if not so much actually changes, and what has been considered 'traditional' is reworked to become the 'new normal'?"

One in five Finns said living in a suburban environment

but near a city has increased in importance in the past 12 months. Greater Helsinki saw less than half the number of people moving there in 2020 than in 2019, and migration loss was historically high in Espoo, the second largest city. Heidi is confident that as many people "moved from autopilot living to living more with intent", they became more conscious of where they spend their time and with whom. Togetherness in Finland is often experienced more through shared interests than through shared space.

Time spent inside for Finns has been their *sauma* (not sauna!) – a window of opportunity – to become happier with their life at home. "Our homes really [set]

the bar quite high. We don't want to leave the house for anything that is not perceived as meaningful!" ●



# Harvest



LITENGÅRD table-top farm makes itself at home in any kitchen

# Mood

Since the first-generation of the LITENGÅRD range hit homes in 2025, fans have been hacking their way to benefits beyond the original flatpack kit. **Lidia Zuin** caught up with neuroscientist and bioartist Robynn Kim, and Lana Womalk, the Head of Wellbeing at IKEA, to hear more about the new Ambiosense features of the most recent updates to LITENGÅRD – and what it means to introduce mood enhancing scents and sounds into kitchens around the world.

It was a sunny afternoon when I met Lana and Robynn in the convivial kitchen that Robynn shares with five other families in the autonomous municipality of Solarvind. Surrounded by the smell of freshly baked pumpkin pie and a comforting fragrance (that I couldn't quite put my finger on), we talked about the Ambiosense experience: the new sound and scent hardware that Robynn's collective developed while huddled during seasonal Covid-19.

"We are each using the early versions of LITENGÅRD to earn SGRÖN tokens and harvest resilient greens that feed our families and neighbours." They add that this daily ritual has fostered "a profound sense of connection and security among our community."

It was during these tweaks to LITENGÅRD that the bioartists developed the Ambiosense experience, a feature that enables this table-top farm to synthesize organic scented compounds which are known to improve mental health. After being approached by IKEA, the collective integrated these features into the circular updates released for the range, making the restorative and mood enhancing effects available to everyone.

**"Our daily rituals have fostered a profound sense of connection and security among our community."**

After applying and receiving a SGRÖN token grant, the collective exchanged it for a homestead on a few acres from the International Land Release programme. "Our home community nurtures generative research," Robynn explained.

"We had already factored in the need for neuro-adapted sound and other sensory compounds that enhance mental health when we first developed LITENGÅRD," adds Lana, "but we were keen to create a more rounded ambience in collaboration with Robynn and the other bioartists, so we could really deliver a powerful experience in homes around the world." ▶



Images by Adam Glover

LITENGÅRD Social tokens are ready for exchange when the family harvests their greens in the newly released 2031 model; the Ambiosense user interface for sound and smell



Lana says these new features are especially relevant in times of community isolation during the dark months of winter, when homes are under increased pressure to meet people's emotional needs. "In the home visits we do, people talk about how LITENGÅRD makes them feel safer and more in control of their home environment. It's a very intentional and adaptable product that brings a biophilic boost to interiors and contributes

to family economies, while also having a profound impact on people's moods," says the Head of Wellbeing at IKEA.

With this new series of rural and farm Ambiosense experiences adapted to LITENGÅRD, users can tune up or down depending on your unique mental health needs. "You can go from full-farm to very light sensitivities, like an evening on a ranch in Montana," explains Lana.

For Robynn, the chance to release a new programme presented even more opportunities to create holistic experiences. "This is why I developed a mood setting that I called BIO.me, which you can also use to grow a blend of slightly sweet herbs," they say. "We use them to brew a neuro-activating tea which has a whole range of palliative and physiological benefits."

Both Lana and Robynn are excited by the possibilities these new features of the LITENGÅRD range introduce. "We believe that customers can benefit from these additions, and also take inspiration from bioartists to develop their own blends," says Lana. Already thinking ahead to next year's circular release, Lana adds that IKEA is keen to grow a whole portfolio of community-curated settings for the Ambiosense experience, starting with Robynn's very own BIO.me. ▶

**"You can use a mood setting, that I called BIO.me, to grow a blend of slightly sweet herbs, which has a whole range of palliative and physiological benefits."**

Family mealtimes are more memorable with fresh greens and mood-boosting smells



Photos copyright Inter IKEA Systems B.V.



# Designing the Future of Life at Home

## Using design fiction to see ahead



What might life at home for the average household look like in, say, ten years time? A small group of friends who share a deep passion for ‘the future mundane’ think it could feature a LITENGÅRD table-top farm alongside the kitchen clutter and mealtime mess of everyday life. Did you spot the fake advert we made for it a few pages back?

**W**e caught up with Julian Bleecker from Near Future Laboratory and our editor-in-chief Katie McCrory to hear why they used design fiction as a way to imagine a more meaningful future that’s better for body and mind – and how they conjured LITENGÅRD out of thin air to make an important point.

**Let’s start with the most important question: what is design fiction?**

**Katie McCrory (KM):** I love the way Julian explains it: You’re sent to a home ten years into the future but you only have five minutes until you’re sent back... What would you grab? You can’t bring a flying car, but maybe you’d grab a magazine or a packet of crisps. Design fiction is a way of creating these everyday future items, and they tell us different things than looking at 3D renderings of impossible forms of transport.

**Julian Bleecker (JB):** I like to say that design fiction is like exercise for our imagination, because it uses that muscle to think about other possible futures beyond the obvious, like going to Mars. Rather than asking what the future of travel will be like, we might start by thinking about the future of the travel ticket and have something that expresses the whole journey. Design fiction is more of a mindset than a technique; it’s a way of framing questions that encourage an open and curious approach.

**Why are you bringing design fiction into how IKEA imagines the future of life at home?**

**KM:** I’ve always been curious about how to use storytelling and insights to innovate, but collaborating with Near Future Laboratory helped us think about the future in a more relatable and everyday way. It’s been really fun to use the IKEA Life at Home Report 2021 as our starting point because it doesn’t just tell us what people want from their homes in the future, but how they want to feel living there.

**JB:** And IKEA is a company that touches so many parts of people’s lives. Together, we can imagine everyday futures through humble, ordinary things, which gives us a modest perspective on someone’s home in the next decade or so. Quite simply, design fiction is a democratic way of talking about the future. ▶

**“We conjured up LITENGÅRD – literally, little farm – a fictional product that captures the needs and dreams of the ideal future at home.”**



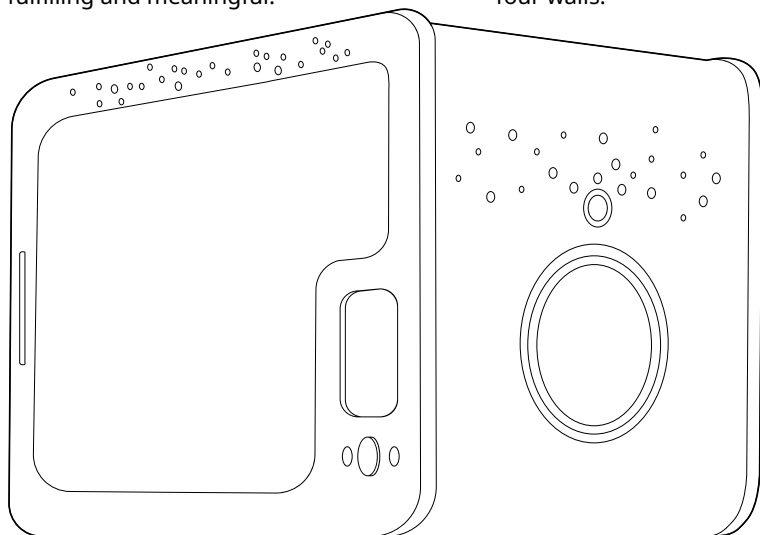
**LITENGÅRD**  
We imagined a ventilation system that runs through a certified Leave No Trace bioplastic that is entirely biodegradable when parts are updated through circular range releases

**KM:** Exactly. This taps into our values and our Democratic Design principles at IKEA too. We want to imagine a future where people have great mental wellbeing, and imagining what this life feels like points us towards opportunities that we might not get to if we only talked about product innovation.

**How is design fiction featured in this magazine?**

**KM:** We took some key insights from the IKEA Life at Home Report 2021, which showed us that people want their ideal home to be cleaner, greener and safer. We also know that feeling good about home helps us feel good about ourselves. This got us thinking about fresh air and the senses – especially taste, smell and sound – and the increased need for security, community and connection within and beyond the four walls.

**JB:** In a sense, the real opportunity comes from not just imagining what a future chair looks like or is made of, but also imagining what the occupant is experiencing and how their life can be fulfilling and meaningful.



**LITENGÅRD**  
Design drawing

**“You’re sent to a home ten years into the future but you only have five minutes until you’re sent back... What would you grab?”**

**JB:** So we imagined a near future where indoor home garden appliances are ubiquitous and ordinary, even in urban contexts. We imagined a device that also produces a biome which circulates natural chemical compounds given off by plant growth, and a subtle audio mechanism that produces “farm fresh” sounds. That’s when we conjured up LITENGÅRD – literally, little farm – it’s a way of turning the report’s insights into a fictional product and service that captures these needs and dreams of the ideal future at home in a way that’s relatable. And we also wrote the kind of article that would promote this product and its benefits in a magazine made ten years from now.

**What will happen next?**

**JB:** This is just a starting point for ongoing conversations about a more habitable world where people feel belonging and purpose. Let’s keep talking about intentional and adaptable living. With design fiction, it’s not a leap to go from home furnishing to the experiences we have at home and what that means for the world. With the reach and impact that IKEA has, I’m excited to see what more we can imagine together.

**KM:** I’d love to make design fiction an everyday part of how we work, so that we ask ourselves better questions that get us closer to the dreams of our customers. Life at home is a constantly evolving story, so design fiction feels like an exciting way to carry on telling it. ●



Julian at work,  
Venice Beach



Katie at home,  
Copenhagen



Photo by Olaf Breuning

Making a home for the  
life that we love.

