

EPISODE 173

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.8] PF: Welcome to Live Happy Now, the podcast to inspire you to live a happier life and give you the tools to make it happen. This week's episode is brought to you by Momentous Institute, powered by the Salesmanship Club of Dallas and dedicated to building and repairing social-emotional health for kids since 1920.

This is Live Happy Science Editor, Paula Felps. Today on episode 173 of Live Happy Now, we're talking with the happiest interior designer you'll ever meet. Rebecca West is the founder of the company Seriously Happy Homes and author of the book *Happy Starts at Home: Getting the Life You Want by Changing the Space You've Got*. She sat down with us to explain how you can make any space your happy place.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:42.9] PF: Well, this is going to be a lot of fun because I've had the pleasure of talking with you before and know that you take a really different approach to home design. I wondered as we start out, if you could explain a little bit to our listeners how your approach is different.

[0:00:57.5] RW: Oh, wow. That's a big question to answer.

[0:00:59.2] PF: Yeah, sort of wow, you know.

[0:01:01.4] RW: Okay. My approach is different, because I didn't come to interior design with an artist mentality. I came to interior design with the idea that I just wanted my own home to feel happy when I came home, as opposed to depressing. When I accomplished that for myself, I realized that home design is incredibly powerful for in terms of how it impacts you and impacts your life. Then that is what I wanted to bring to other people when I joined this industry, is like, it doesn't matter how it looks to somebody else, it's how it feels to you.

[0:01:33.3] PF: When you talk about the fact that you wanted to be happy in your home, we hear that a lot and I want my home to be my happy place and we hear that, but what does it mean to you when someone says they want to be happy at home?

[0:01:44.8] RW: Yeah. It means that the house is working with them and for them for what they want to achieve in their life, and that is such a personal and really unique thing to each person, because one person might really want a really lively and full social life and their home is part of that, because they want to bring friends into – their friends into their home. For some people, their home needs to really be a refuge and a sanctuary, because of their crazy life and they need to be that – it needs to be a private space, a private happy space for them.

To me, when I say that a home should be somebody's happy space, it really is about digging deep into what do you need when you come home at the end of the day and what do you need from your house? Hardly, that's aesthetic obviously, because the things you look at should be what's creating that vibe, but the underlying root should be how it feels. That's not just the aesthetics. It's also who's in your house, what's in your house, who's allowed in what spaces and do you feel like you have places that are for you and for what you need.

[0:02:46.9] PF: We get caught up in thinking, “Well, this is what my neighbor's house looks like, or my friends' houses look like, and so this is what mine should look like.” Do we get so caught up in what other people are doing, that we ignore what would make us happy?

[0:03:00.2] RW: Oh, absolutely. I mean, it's not entirely wrong to pay attention to what's happening in the world trend-wise and stuff, because we do tend to feel a little bit better when we feel like we measure up, I guess. Feeling like your home is updated and fresh, that is going to tap into what's happening in the world right now, or with my neighbor's homes?

What happens is we can fall too deeply into that and start thinking, “Well, I should have this shiny new dining table, because, I don't know, because my sister says I should, or because my neighbors have it, or because my mother is gifting it to me.” There's so much that gets wrapped up in what comes into our homes in terms of guilt, or money. There's so much baggage there.

We do lose sight of what will very – at its most simple, what will create contentment for us in our spaces, and sometimes that's going to be what your neighbors are doing, and a lot of times it's not.

[0:03:56.4] PF: What's so interesting in talking with you and being on your website, which gives so much great advice about how we can approach our homes differently, one thing I found really fascinating is that you talk about how being happy at home can even help us sleep better, and it can help us lose weight. Now those are two things, like every woman's ears just perked up. Can you tell, like how does it make a difference?

[0:04:19.1] RW: Yeah. Well sleeping better, there's a lot of levels to that. It can be as simple as if your bedroom – well first of all, your bed's uncomfortable, then you're physically getting in the way of a good night's sleep. Also what's in your bedroom, like if there's the unfolded laundry and piles of junk mail and the work that is due on tomorrow's deadline, when you wake up and just see that first thing in the morning, or if you're going to sleep and that's the last thing your eyes see when you're going to sleep, that weighs on you subconsciously and you're going to have more anxiety during your sleep cycle.

Then there's the house itself. If you walk into your house and you have this sense of, “Oh, there's so much I have to do and I'm so embarrassed by that pile of stuff in the corner I keep meaning to deal with. Oh, there's the thing that I bought with my ex-husband and I've been divorced for 10 years.” That's your journey through your house. By the time you get to your bedroom, your house hasn't reduced the anxiety of the day, if anything, it's added to the anxiety of the day. None of that helps you sleep better.

Then of course, the converse is true, if all of those things are making you feel good about your life and yourself and how hard you work and the people that are in your life, then there's nothing getting in the way of that good quality sleep aside from normal everyday stress, which we're trying to mitigate. Then things like losing weight, it's a very similar conversation. Again, going back to the basics, if you hate your kitchen, if it's filled with clutter and if the cabinet doors are falling off their hinges, then it's not going to be a place you want to be. If you're supposed to be cooking healthy meals for yourself, but you hate being in that room, then you are literally putting this big roadblock in front of – between you and your goal.

Then beyond just whether or not your kitchen is working for you, it's the same things; do you like how it feels? What a fresh coat of paint does make you want to be in there more? It's fundamental foundations of is your bed comfortable, can you find the knives in your kitchen, all the way to is do you love your kitchen and that's regardless of whether or not your mother-in-law loves your kitchen.

[0:06:29.1] PF: Sometimes we have a kitchen and maybe you're not in love with it, but this is what you have. You're not going to be able to go out and do the \$20,000 kitchen remodel. How can we take a space that we are not thrilled with and turn it into something that we can really embrace?

[0:06:44.8] RW: Well, a lot of times it's in small changes and it's also in things that we let go. I mean, if you're in a situation where you have the hinges aren't working on your cabinets, that's a fixable thing and it doesn't take a whole remodel. You can have somebody come in and just do some of those minor repairs and put a coat of paint on the wall, and that alone can make you feel refreshed and invigorated, and it can get some momentum going for you for some of the other changes you might need to make too.

I mean, a big remodel is awesome, right? Getting your dream kitchen is amazing, but most of us are living real lives and making decisions about our money and that doesn't always mean that you decide on a kitchen remodel, but that shouldn't keep you from saying, "Well, what can I do?" Looking at it from a really positive perspective, knowing that you're not powerless. There are things that you can do that don't take a lot of money that will get you towards your goals. Don't get paralyzed by the fact that you can't do the big project and use that as an excuse for not doing anything.

[0:07:45.0] PF: Well, and then what are the biggest mistakes that you see people making when they start setting up their home? You want that alphabetically, chronologically –

[0:07:56.2] RW: All right. You've got a very practical decorating level. Most people tend to go to small with the things that they bring into their home. They'll buy little art and little lamps and little rugs, because it can be scary to buy them, or expensive thing. What can happen is the space feels cluttered, because it's lots of little things. If you go into designing any room with a plan, then you can go, "All right, I can commit myself to this 8 by 10 rug, which is \$500 more than the

5 by 7 rug, but the whole room is going to feel more finish,” and that takes planning. That's the fundamental design phase, people tend to need to scale up their art, their lamps, and their rugs.

Then the other big picture problem they make they have is listening to other people's advice, especially if they don't have confidence around what they're trying to create in their space, then they rely on the advice of all their friends and family members, and they end up with this space that might make other people happy, but doesn't necessarily make them happy. They're not listening to their own intuition.

[0:09:06.3] PF: Yeah. One thing I noticed is that everyone that comes in if you ask them, “Hey, what should I do with this art?” We did this when we move to Nashville three years ago, we probably had six different people that were like, “Hey, what do you think of this?” Every one of them had a different idea. Now I'm like, “Okay, great. We can never have any of those people over, because we've taken up their advice.”

[0:09:27.6] RW: Well, there's that. Then something to be said for crowdsourcing, because that gives you a lot of different ways to think outside the box for whatever the question is, but you got it at the end, okay line up all that advice and go, “What would make me happy to come home to?”

[0:09:43.0] PF: Well, what happens when there's something that makes you happy to come home to, but maybe not the person you're living with? Let's take deer heads, let's just throw it out there. Let's take deer heads on the wall. I think there's this certain segment called males that find that appealing and another segment that does not. What can you do when you've got this big disconnect in what looks good and what doesn't?

[0:10:07.2] RW: Well, when I work with couples, the first thing I do is I try and take it away from a verbal conversation, because what we describe and what we think somebody else is describing verbally is not usually the best representation of something that's going to be visual. The first thing to try and do is get on the same visual page, and we all have my clients do like, let's say we're doing a living room. I'll have one of the members of the couple's show me 10 images of living rooms. They would just love to come home to, and I have the other person do the same thing, but separately, because in fact, I often find that my couples are not that far apart from each other in the big picture of what they want for a space.

That process helps them look for common ground; what do we have in common for the space we want to create? Then you can come in with the compromise of okay, well we've got these common goals and then maybe he wants a deer head and she would like some ruffles and well, let's see if we can fit some of those things in that are a little bit more personal, or one-sided. For me, what works best is starting with common ground, because it's not his house, it's not her house. The idea is that it's our house, and that's going to be different from his or hers.

[0:11:23.3] PF: How do you keep it from being one-sided? Because there are certain homes you go into and you're like, "Okay, we see who's in charge of the decorating."

[0:11:31.7] RW: Oh, yeah. There's houses I go into and you never know, a man even lived there. It's crazy. I think part of it is some awareness. I've talked with some of my clients who are in that situation and they didn't really recognize that they had created that situation. In reflecting on it, they didn't really want their spouse to feel like they've moved out of the house.

I think it's going back when you're starting that conversation. Ideally, you're going, "All right, let's make sure we're both reflected. Let's make sure if our friends come over, they're going to know that we both live here." The further you are along – if you've been living like that for 10, or 20 years, it can be hard to undo some of that. Usually, I'd start with one space, one room, where you start creating a together space again.

[0:12:18.5] PF: What I love about your approach is that you also use meditation. I mean, there's so much of your design that it's built so solidly in positive psychology, that's it's just fascinating. Can you speak to the fact of the meditation that you use and how that helps people discover what's right for them?

[0:12:36.6] RW: Absolutely. It's not something I require about my clients. I make, it's a resource that's available. I have found in my own life that letting somebody, or listening to a guided meditation, or doing guided meditation work with – I work with this wonderful woman named Iris Higgins. We have the answers we need inside of us. Pretty much a 100%, we know the right answers, but a lot of times we can't get there on our own. We need somebody else to help uncover those answers. Meditation can do that work.

If you allow your brain to quiet down and you get asked the questions of what do you want to feel like, what do you need to come home to, what are you needing in your world right now, and if you let those answers come out of your own instincts and your own intuition, then you can apply that to whatever space. It could be your office, it could be your home, it could be your car, your wardrobe. It's all a matter of tapping into what are you needing in your life now. Bear in mind, that will change over time too. It's not like you can do this once, and then know what you're going to need a decade from now because you'll be living in a different chapter of your life. At any moment, you can tap into your own intuition, either with the meditation like the one I have on my website, or working with a guiding coach.

[0:13:55.3] PF: Now, do people get surprised by the results of this? Because, I think a lot of times, we enter into a process and think we know what we want. Maybe when you do a meditation, you might find out that really what you're wanting is something very different than what you thought you were going after. Has that been your experience?

[0:14:15.6] RW: Absolutely. Both with the meditations and with the standard homework of just going online and finding 10 rooms you like. Either way, I often hear from people, "Wow, I saw – I wanted something really colorful and vibrant, but actually I need some quiet and some calm, or vice versa. Or I thought I needed to change my living room, but I don't. I like it." That comes up more often than you might expect, where people thought they needed to make some changes, but in fact, they were responding to the shoulds in their life, their well-meaning friends and the magazine articles they're eating. They don't actually need to make that change, or maybe they just need to give it a good vacuuming and they're done.

[0:14:54.8] PF: What changes do they see in themselves when you change the space that you're living at?

[0:14:59.3] RW: I would call it – there's a congruence that happens. When you do this work and you come home to a space that feels like you, then there's this congruency between who you are when you leave the house, when you come home, when you're interacting with people, even if you're on the phone with somebody, they're not even in the space, but you are and you just feel at home. I hate to be so touchy feeling, but it's this feeling of being at home. It's a literal thing.

It has nothing to do with the house, because you can be at home in a lot of spaces. It's about being comfortable in your environment. I watch people just relax into their space. They're not working so hard to manage so much. Does that make sense?

[0:15:45.7] PF: It absolutely does. Yeah, when you have that place where you have your refuge, where you do feel like, this is me and this is exactly what I need around me, yeah, that's a complete feeling of comfort.

[0:15:57.9] RW: Yeah. Plus ideally, it means you have at least one place in your life that isn't saying that there's something you have to do.

[0:16:06.7] PF: You've got so many great resources on your website and we're also going to give them a copy of your guided meditation that they can download. For someone who's listening today and what can they do right now to start using some of this information and start making their happier place for themselves?

[0:16:25.5] RW: I would encourage them to, as soon as they get home tonight, look around and if anything that their eye lands on that makes them feel frustrated, it could be, I mean oftentimes –

[0:16:37.8] PF: Wait, what if it's a teenager?

[0:16:39.6] RW: Teenager. Okay, I can't actually help with the actual humans who are living in the house. If they walk in and the first thing they see is the console table is full of junk mail, and just irritate them, immediately scoop it up, put it into the recycle bin. Just take one minute, 10 minutes max and move something in your house that needs to be moved, either to the recycle bin, or it needs to be dusted, or you need to change a light bulb, the little, the low-hanging fruit, do one little thing like that and it'll shift the energy in the house and then you can do the next thing and the next thing, and that will take you down that road to having that happy home that's working for you and not against you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[INTERVIEW]

[0:17:28.9] PF: That was Rebecca West, author of *Happy Starts at Home: Getting the Life You Want by Changing the Space You've Got*. You can read more about Rebecca's tips for finding happiness at home in our all-new bookazine that's hitting newsstands now.

Here to tell us more about the bookazine is Live Happy CEO, Deborah Heisz. Deb, thanks for joining us.

[0:17:47.1] DH: Thanks Paula. I'm so happy to be on the podcast, as you know it's one of my favorite things that we do here at Live Happy. Whenever I can make time and whenever you'll have me, I love to join the podcast.

[0:17:59.7] PF: You're always welcome. We have a new feature that we get to tell our listeners about today with this bookazine.

[0:18:06.3] DH: Yeah. I'm super excited about this, because we've been publishing a magazine for several years and what we really came up with was the idea that people needed a guide, not just a magazine article every now and then, but really a reference piece that they could turn to, to give them the information they need. We took the time to pull together the best happiness, the best information we had for the past several years and put it into one single bookazine. A bookazine is really a book/magazine. It's exactly what you think; book and a magazine got together and had a baby, that's what a bookazine is.

[0:18:42.8] PF: Then they named it Live Happy.

[0:18:44.0] DH: Then they named it Live Happy, which is a great name. Really, it enables us to put all of the best tips, the best articles, the best science in one piece that you can find in bookstores.

[0:18:55.2] PF: This is something we're going to be doing every year, correct?

[0:18:58.2] DH: Yes, we're going to continue to do the bookazine every year. We think it's a good way to get the information out there, because really happiness information is evergreen. I mean, there isn't anything we've written about in the past four years that isn't evergreen, that

isn't true, just as true tomorrow as it was when we wrote about it. This is a way to have that content live and get to more people for a longer period of time.

[0:19:21.6] PF: How long is it going to be on the newsstands? How easy will it be to find and how long can people find it?

[0:19:26.8] DH: Well, it'll be on newsstands starting in late September, early October, depending on the newsstand. It'll be on at least through the holiday season, so you should be able to find it at least through the end of January, unless of course, it sells out, which if it's sells out, I'm sure we can find you a copy if you want to go to livehappy.com, or the Live Happy store, we'll be able to – you can buy a copy there after that. It will definitely be on the newsstands for at least through the holiday season.

[0:19:53.8] PF: You're saying that people can buy this as a stocking stuffer?

[0:19:57.2] DH: They can buy it as a stocking stuffer, they can buy it as a gift, anybody that they know who might need a little happiness in their life, this is a good gift to give to them, because it gives them something they can refer to on a daily, or a weekly basis. You don't have to sit – it's not a book. You don't sit down and read it from cover to cover, but it's also not a magazine where you read one or two or three articles and then you move on. This is something that you're going to want to keep, because like I said, the information here is evergreen. It's a great reference piece, or it's a great thing just to pick up every now and then when you want to have some good in your life, want to read something good. There's also some great stuff in here like some posters that you can put on the wall, or some postcards you can send to other people to brighten their day.

We really are hoping that people not only get a copy of the bookazine, but continue to refer to it for a long period of time, because everything in here is something that can really help you improve your life, your family's life, your home, everything that – your work skills. There's just a ton of information in it that you can use to really create the life you want, which is what all of us here at Live Happy wants you to be able to do.

[0:21:05.7] PF: One of the things, one of the main themes that runs through this one is about thriving at every age. I know this is something that you were very – you felt very strongly about,

it's very important to you. Can you tell me why that was so important and tell us a little bit about how that translated into these different stories that we did?

[0:21:23.9] DH: Well, a lot of the study and the research that have been coming out when I attended the International Positive Psychology Association with you last year, or all the research that we've been reading that's been coming out of the last three or four years, something has really struck me is that happiness – everybody is out looking for some anti-aging thing, whether it's something to make them look younger, something to help them be healthier longer, whatever it is, but really when I started to look the research and I went to all of these conferences on happiness and we started talking about it, or positive psychology and everybody we're talking to, what really struck me is that happiness may be the ultimate anti-aging product.

There's so many studies that show that you live not only a longer, but a richer life if you have a positive attitude, if you have an optimistic outlook, if you have meaning, if you have spirituality, if you have your health, all of these things that we talk about at Live Happy as being important. As being components of happiness, really do help you live a richer, fuller and longer life.

We talk about thriving at every age, of course, you can be happy when you're a child, you're in school and we've got tips for that. We've got things about how you can create a happier workplace, or you can be happier in your job, or happier in your career. It also extends into being healthier. It extends into having a better quality of life. That word thrive that we use, thrive at every age, I just don't want to live longer. I don't want to just live a rich full life now. I want to feel like I'm thriving. I want to feel like I'm the best me that I can be.

We put a lot of articles in here and a lot of tips in here on how really to thrive at whatever age you're at. It's all tanked at, woven together to me, to be both happiness as an anti-aging message, but also you should be thriving right now no matter where you are in life.

I want to talk about the word 'thrive' one more time, because the person I hear use that word the most in our space is Dr. Martin Seligman, who's really the father of positive psychology. He really talks about thriving as being what we're striving for as humans. We don't just want to live and exist. We truly want to thrive.

Isn't our word, it's a word that I just think applies to what we're trying to do. I also want to call attention to something that is in the bookazine, which is we have this great piece that it's a little bit of a poster, it's actually a spread, but it's what happiness does for your health. There's a ton of information on particular spread about how practicing gratitude and getting outside and developing a mindfulness and meditation practice can help you be healthier, but it also talks about the benefits of happiness in terms of it boosts your immune system, it lengthens your lifespan, it helps you sleep better, it strengthens your heart. There's just so much related to health, and I don't think we can truly thrive if we're not healthy. Health, happiness, anti-aging, thriving, it's all tied up into one thing and there's so much about it in this bookazine. We could probably talk about it forever, but we only have seven minutes.

[0:24:47.2] PF: They would pull the plug on us.

[0:24:48.7] DH: They would. Well, or they'd have to get to their destination and get out of the car and go to work.

[0:24:53.7] PF: Well, there is that. Well Deb, thank you so much for coming in and for talking with us about this and for letting us get up and do this every day.

[0:25:04.1] DH: Well, it is my pleasure. I am thrilled that we are where we are. We're having so much fun at Live Happy. Sometimes it doesn't feel like a job at all. It's my pleasure to be on the podcast, but I want to remind everybody that we're part of the happiness movement, and the more people that we get to listen to the podcast, the more people that we get to access the information, the more we get the word out there, the happier world we're going to have. Take time to invest a little bit of your time in what we're doing at Live Happy and help us get the message out there.

With that, thanks Paula for having me on.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:25:34.7] PF: That's all for this episode of Live Happy Now. If you like what you've heard here today and want to hear more, go to Apple podcast, or wherever you get your favorite podcast, search for Live Happy Now and subscribe today. Of course as always, we're going to give you a

special gift just for listening. Go to our Live Happy Store at livehappy.com, enter the promo code Podcast Deal and we will give you 20% off anything, everything you like in the store.

Special thanks today to the Momentous Institute for bringing us this episode of Live Happy Now. The Momentous Institute's seventh annual change in the odds conference will be held September 27th and 28th at Omni Dallas Hotel. Visit momentousinstitute.org to register and find out more about the panel of education and mental health experts you can enjoy at that conference. That is all we have time for today, so please join us back here next week. Until then, remember to make every day a happy one.

[END]