

Many a homeowner suffers from Cinderella syndrome. Who hasn't fantasized about awakening to a whole new landscape extending from the kitchen counters to the bedroom closet, at the wave of a fairy godmother's wand — or a professional designer's whim? Everything new and coordinated, everything in its place.

The coziest and most comfortable homes though are often the ones that evolve organically, over time. Maybe they began with hand-me-down furniture or with a few vintage pieces picked up at a flea market. Store-bought items soon join in. In time old pieces learn to live with new finds, like a well-blended family.

Assuming each room is periodically subject to a close edit, gradually they become greater than the sum of their various parts. Call it "Slow Deco."

A friend with a good eye likes to improve on this scenario through a regular ritual she calls switch-swap-and-swipe. "Think wall art, throw pillows, vases, bowls, and objects," she says.

Never content to sit still, my friend, Meredith, regularly roams around her Midtown New York apartment, moving things around. Furniture, sure, to the surprise of her nonplused husband, whose feet keep reaching for his favorite ottoman. But often it's smaller, more mobile items, things like fruit bowls, vases, African fabrics, and artwork.

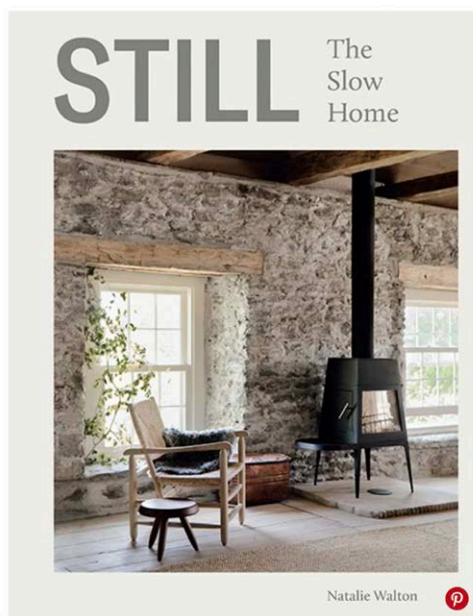
Meredith began her life as a rearranger with two marble-topped tables gleaned from her grandmother's Pennsylvania homestead. It was hard to tell what flattered them most: Standing together under a vintage mirror on an antique decorative carpet, or separated and set off by wildly contemporary accessories.

More recently, it was the question of a blank wall in the kitchen, visible from the front door. Leave it a calm white — most of this sky-high apartment is a crisp mix of black and white — or give it a little visual kick with a wallpaper panel featuring a tiger?

It takes time to allow such things to develop and an ability to see old haunts with a fresh eye. I'd been in my own apartment for a long time when Meredith asked if she could "try something." Next thing I know she's manhandling a chunky glass-front cabinet I had backed up against a living room wall, wiggling it onto a bath mat and dragging it off down the hall. Bingo: The living room opened up, along with a new sightline. As interior designer Craig Kellogg commented when once contemplating a bulky blond-wood dressing table I like to keep around, "Empty space can be a good thing."

My style is decorating by default, to borrow a phrase from [Natalie Walton](#), a stylist and the author of a trio of books on home decor. “By default” helps explain my husbanding of a burnished black leather sofa — purchased secondhand in Paris nearly 30 years ago and now oddly hard to let go of — when everyone, Walton especially, would be much happier if I had a low-slung sectional in bone-colored linen.

Walton makes the case for slow and thoughtful decorating in [“Still: The Slow Home,”](#) (pictured below) a travelogue of pared-down homes with carefully chosen furnishings in a chaste mix of white, off-white, unstained birch, and unbleached muslin. (And she has four kids.)



Walton sees slow decor as akin to the the [SLOW \(sustainable local organic\) food movement](#), which shuns Big Macs in favor of a barely bubbling pot of locally raised, organic beef. “We can embrace the slow movement in our homes by being more intentional about how we live,” she says, speaking from her casual-gorgeous home in Byron Bay, New South Wales, Australia. A slow home should be a showcase for “objects that help us connect to our spaces meaningfully,” she says.

“I am a big proponent of having only what you really love and you really need and use,” says Walton, who unsurprisingly teaches a master class in decluttering.

So step back from speed shopping. “In our culture we are constantly adding things,” Walton notes. “It’s never been easier, with online [retailers] and sales. But things used to be added slowly to our homes, and we need to go back to that.”