


Chaya Weiner

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Sep 26 · 12 min read



# “The world needs more YOU so don’t drink the poison of comparison” with Lisa Kahn and Chaya Weiner

The world needs more YOU so don’t hide, try to imitate others or drink the poison of comparison. The older I get, the more I realize how unique we each are and how much happier we are when we just celebrate our individuality. I see this so much on social media — comparing ourselves to others underlines a notion of “not-enoughness” that is destructive and makes us deeply unhappy. We are more than enough. I learned that I just need to stay in my lane and be 150% Lisa.

*As part of my series about health and wellness leaders, I had the pleasure of interviewing Lisa Kahn, from Lisa Kahn Designs. In designing homes around the world, Lisa has always been intrigued by the relationship between the built environment and the human spirit. In her work and in her writing, she seeks to explore how we can create spaces that nurture us — not only physically and aesthetically, but also emotionally and spiritually. She sees her work as creating sanctuaries: peaceful spaces of beauty and order, creativity and light that focus on the wellness within us. Most of the Western world spends up to 90% of their time indoors. Lisa’s work and her philosophy, known as Finding Sanctuary™, seek to mitigate the severed connections imposed through this circumstance, helping to restore balance, well-being and health as a result. Creating a Zen-like retreat for each of her luxury residential clients is not what Lisa Kahn Designs does. That would be far too simplistic and unrealistic. The magic of her talent is building spaces that are true homes — functional, fun, family-oriented and ultimately livable homes — that also act as restorative engines for mind, body and soul. That’s a tall order and one which she consistently achieves with beautiful results. Lisa Kahn Designs, headquartered in Naples, Florida, serves discerning clients across the U.S. and around the globe. Her award-winning work is featured in numerous luxury magazines and online publications. As an extension of her design work, and an expression of her lifestyle, Lisa developed the Finding Sanctuary blog and an online course, Seven Days to Sanctuary. Her book, Sanctuary: A Philosophy of Space, is also in the works. In addition to her successful design business, Lisa is completing her Master’s degree in transformational psychology.*

**Thank you so much for doing this with us! What is your “backstory”?**

Lisa credits her daughter Chloe, now 20, as the catalyst for her tapping into the possibilities of creating sanctuary through interior design. “My daughter gave me a gift on the day she born,” she reflects. “It took me years to open it. But once I did, my life changed profoundly. The contents of that package set off an explosion of truth and growth.”

Ultimately, the stresses of raising a daughter with special needs who went from one diagnosis, medication list, specialist, and school to another, and who required constant supervision just to keep her, her environment, and those around her safe, guided Lisa’s design work toward discovering elements in the built environment that can foster wellness, calm and joy: peaceful spaces of beauty and order, creativity and light. “I want to share with other families struggling with children with special needs or children with other mental-health issues how to create spaces in their own homes that can nurture — not only physically and esthetically, but emotionally and spiritually,” she explains.

Lisa’s journey has been fraught with challenge. But through her design innovations, she found solace. Her story is personal — a real story of one woman’s hair-pulling, often tearful journey of trying, trying, and trying again to help her child blossom into the beautiful, creative woman she always believed was there, but was continually thwarted in opening up. Once Lisa found this key in her own profession her whole life changed.

**Can you share the interesting story that happened to you since you started your career?**

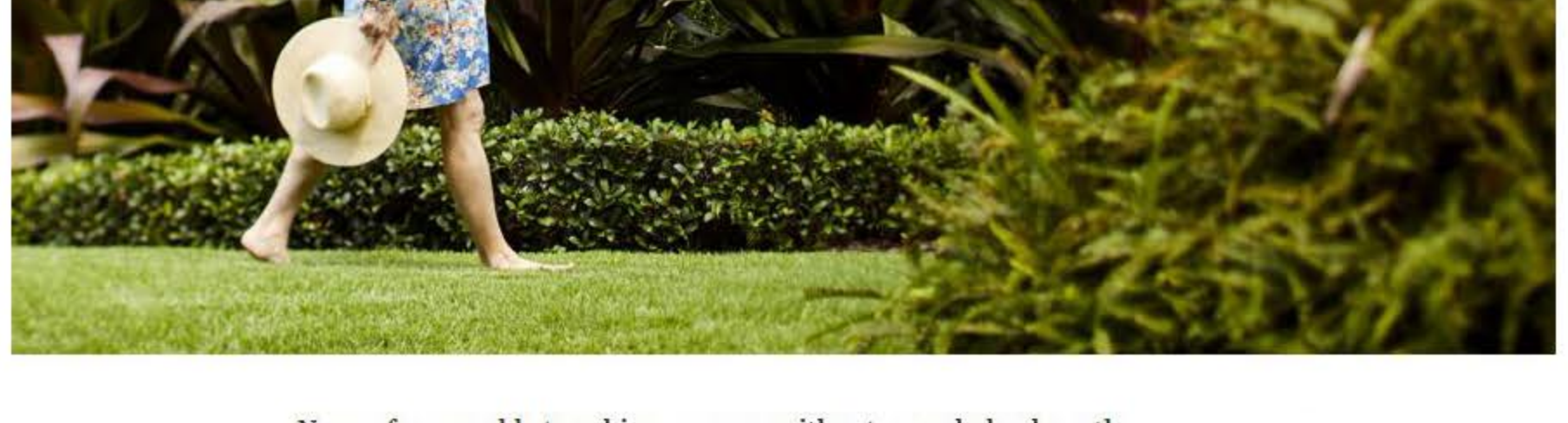
I went through a wrenching divorce about 10 years ago, which happened to be about 10 years into owning my design firm. I ended up reconnecting with a musician friend from high school through Facebook. This was back when Facebook was just getting popular and everyone was loving Twitter. He had been living in the same Florida town as I was, 1800 miles from where we grew up, for years. Somehow, we just hadn’t run into each other. It turned out I needed my first website and he needed a first client. Our romance was born through social media, technology and memories of performing music together when we were in our most painful, teenage years. We got married in our 40’s and started over together. He actually proposed to me in person, and had scheduled his proposal to appear on Facebook and Twitter at the same time. There was a social media storm that evening. Our union has fueled my creativity, my joy, my re-connection with everything from my childhood to my most aspirational dreams. We worked together to create Finding Sanctuary, an off-shoot of my interior design firm where we explore and celebrate the profound ways our environments affect our lives.

**Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?**

I ordered a package of window treatments for a project and because the client was rushing me to finish, I skipped the step of requesting cuttings of the fabrics for approval. The fabrics shipped directly to the workroom without my preview, were cut and sewn into the various styles and I met the installer on site. You can imagine my surprise when the shade was pulled out for the master bath and it was made of black fabric, rather than the cream I thought I ordered. It turns out I made a one number error in my style number entry on my purchase order. Yikes! What did I learn? To do things properly and have boundaries in place that I insist are respected, no matter how rushed anyone is feeling.

**Are you working on any new or exciting projects now?**

We are always working on exciting new projects! Right now, we are working on a boutique hotel, a penthouse condo and many other private home projects. We are working on projects in Naples, New York City, Munich and California. It’s fun working out of town because we get to stretch our wings and see what sanctuary can look like all over the world. We are also creating an e-commerce site where we will be featuring fabulous, curated, artisan products for the home and a collection that we are designing specifically to support our message of sacred, sanctuary spaces.



**None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?**

My dad helped me start my business back in 2000. He loaned me the money, made me a binder that had all of the documents I needed and wrote a quote to me in the front that reads: “Integrity is what you do when no one is looking.” I have opened that binder and read that quote a million times. And I have paused to consider how he would have handled many different situations. When he passed several years ago, I felt bereft without his ongoing support and counsel. But it’s interesting how other people come into our lives and fill roles of coach, mentor, and advisor just when we need them most.

**Can you share your top three “lifestyle tweaks” that will help people feel great?**

1. Give yourself permission to slow down, take a few minutes and catch up with yourself. Show up in your body and see how you are feeling. It will give you a good gauge on where you are and if you need to regroup, refresh your spirit and reconsider your position on whatever you are facing at any given moment. I call this the “Art of the Pause.” It keeps me from reacting to circumstances around me out of an unnecessarily or overly emotional place.
2. Develop a routine of self-care in the morning and in the evening. It can be whatever you like — meditation, writing, taking a walk, snuggling with your dog, reading, taking a bath or making a favorite cup of tea. Be establish the practice of caring for yourself on a regular basis and be disciplined about it. It helps make us strong and resilient. When we get worn down, we aren’t in a good place to cope with the curve balls that life is bound to throw us.
3. Follow your curious mind. Whatever calls to you to learn, whatever you feel like trying out, whoever you feel like meeting, GO FOR IT. This is how we stay interested and interesting. It’s also how we stay youthful and maintain flexibility.

**Is there a particular book that made an impact on you? Can you share a story?**

I read *The Artist’s Way* by Julia Cameron many years ago and I love her system of recovering and nurturing your inner artist — we all have one, regardless of how we express our innate creativity. Her concept of writing Morning Pages is nothing short of brilliant. It changed my life in the very best ways and I will continue that practice as long as I live. It’s that powerful. She says that writing them makes you more authentic. I have to agree.

**If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of wellness to the most amount of people, what would that be?**

This is my favorite question ever! It would be a movement of the ultimate expression of self-love: creating sacred, sanctuary spaces for ourselves and others. And truthfully, I’ve already started it! Although, as some aspects of the understanding of sacred space date back to the very first philosophers, perhaps I should rephrase my answer and say that I have joined this movement. I speak on this topic, write about it and share it with everyone I meet. I design it into my projects and into every facet of my life and business. I have even gone back to school, seeking a master’s degree to I share my message of wellness in our environments and of sanctuary with everyone I meet. I tailor it to different groups of people, but I have a soft place in my heart for special needs children and adults. As a result, I have joined a local non-profit board where I live in Naples, Florida called STARability. This year, I stepped into the role of Board President. We are developing programs for educating, nurturing and assisting special needs individuals in our community. It’s some of the most rewarding work I’ve done.

I have also worked with our local mental health center on their facilities to create a more sanctuary-like environment for patients and staff. This is how I love to give back. It literally changes the world. All big shifts start on this small, local level.

**What are your “5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Started” and why. (Please share a story or example for each.)**

1. You can’t get it wrong, so just put yourself out there and go for it.

Starting my own design firm has been my favorite example of this truth. Along the way of owning my business I have done some things right and made lots of mistakes, but with this journey has come understanding, life experience and a movement toward self-realization. You can’t ask for more than that.

2. The world needs more YOU so don’t hide, try to imitate others or drink the poison of comparison.

The older I get, the more I realize how unique we each are and how much happier we are when we just celebrate our individuality. I see this so much on social media — comparing ourselves to others underlines a notion of “not-enoughness” that is destructive and makes us deeply unhappy. We are more than enough. I learned that I just need to stay in my lane and be 150% Lisa.

3. The best way to share your message of truth with the world is to live it yourself.

When I conceived my concept of sanctuary, my business coach, Gail Doby, gave me what sounded like a simple directive — don’t just talk about it, live sanctuary. I was quite excited to try this, until I realized how hard it was to be congruent in my truth. But that challenge has unearthed such growth and positive change in my entire approach to life. I will be forever indebted

Julia Cameron wrote, “Treating yourself like a precious object will make you strong.” I found that through all of the most difficult moments, the more kind I am with myself, the more able I am to respond to life with equanimity. So, I make a practice of this. I treat myself like I want others to treat me. It has shifted my entire life experience.

5. You are far more brave, wise and strong than you know.

Going back to school at 50 to pursue higher education has been humbling in some ways. But I have also come to realize that true learning isn’t just inserting information into our minds. It’s accessing the deep knowing that we all have, the intrinsic knowledge we all share. This knowledge is inside of us and needs to be activated. School has been a wonderful avenue for this experience and I see now that I will be a lifelong, passionate learner. And in this way, I will be forever young.

**Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”?**

“You are not a human being having a spiritual experience, you are a spiritual being having a human experience.” I can’t remember where I read that, but it has stuck with me and helps me maintain perspective and reminds me of our connection to each other, the planet and to the Divine.

**Some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this if we tag them :-)**

I would love to meet novelist Anne Lamott — she is one of the most authentic, witty, fabulous women I know of. I admire her writing and her life philosophy endlessly, and I would love to create a sanctuary for her and her family. As with all of us, she truly deserves one.

I also would love to sit with author Elizabeth Gilbert. She is another incredible woman with a beautiful brain, deep humility and mad wisdom. I feel a kindred spirit in her.

My last one is Oprah. I love her work and her Soul Sunday interviews so much. She has a way of finding the most interesting people who are all working hard to change the world in meaningful ways. She is a magnet for great people with memorable stories — I would like to hear hers.

**What is the best way our readers can follow you on social media?**

Follow Lisa on her website <https://lisakahndesigns.com/>, Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/lisakahndesigns/> and Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/lisakahndesigns/>

Follow Finding Sanctuary on Lisa’s blog <https://www.facebook.com/findingsanctuary.lk/>, Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/finding.sanctuary/>, Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/findingsanctuary.lk/> and learn more about Lisa’s online class *Seven Days to Sanctuary* go to <https://findingsanctuary.com/sanctuary-101/>

**Thank you for all of these great insights!**