

BUSINESS OF HOME

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Dream Bigger

Meet the moment
with a new mindset

can mentally limit you. Sometimes, the word that's associated with your job doesn't necessarily mesh with something that I want you to do, or with something that you even think that you can do—mentally, it just doesn't check that box. I find that being more creative and having the office work more interactively is far more interesting.



The Sanctuary Builder

A series of personal crises prompted Naples, Florida-based Lisa Kahn to rethink the meaning of her work, prompting a spiritual epiphany that helped turn the tide. By harnessing the power of gratitude and nature to create spaces that promote inner and outer peace, Kahn found abundance in both business and life.

What was the change you needed to make to spring ahead?

Twelve years ago, when I was 10 years into my business, I went through a very dark period. I think we all go there from time to time. My daughter has had special needs since she was about 18 months old: developmental disabilities, attention problems and behavior issues. When she turned 11, she started having seizures that would last eight hours if you didn't treat them. We spent weeks at a time in children's hospitals with electrodes glued to her head, trying different medications and to get to the cause.

It was a very wrenching time. The seizures would typically happen at night, so I was unable to sleep—and by the time I'd finally get her back to sleep, it was time for me to get up, and then she couldn't go to school the next day because she was so wrung out. I was also in the process of divorcing her father, who was going through his own dark days, and I was having some issues in my business. So I was feeling incredibly burned out. I remember thinking, "What is the meaning of what I do?" I felt like I was stuck in a gerbil wheel. It just felt very rote.

As I was chewing on all of this and feeling incredibly sorry for myself, I went for a walk by the lake behind my house. I was so desperate—like, how did I end up here and how do I shift this energy?

I glanced at the lake at the exact moment the sun came up over the top of the trees, where it's all pink on top and glowing yellow. As the sun was lifting, I paused, and a wind picked up and blew all the way down the lake. It lifted my hair and I got goosebumps from the top of my head to the bottom of my toes, and I promise you, I heard the word "sanctuary" whispered in the wind. I know that sounds really weird, but it actually happened. All I could think was, "Oh, thank god! That's what I want. I want to feel better. I want a refuge."

Did it feel like an answer?

I continued walking home, puzzling over it. Why this word? Why now? But I also realized that if I had a sanctuary space for my daughter Chloe, it would be a zone where she couldn't hurt herself. We could do soft carpets and everything would be low to the ground. I could have things to help her get her emotions out—maybe screaming into a pillow or dancing wildly to karaoke in the mirror. And if I created that safe zone for her, and I was able to give her that gift—to say, "OK, Chloe, this is your sanctuary. When you are not feeling good, this is where you go, and you can do whatever you want here. It's all you"—I thought maybe it would help our whole family, because so often it was like living with a Tasmanian devil. So I did it: I made that space for her, and the entire family dynamic changed immediately. Everything calmed down.

What did you do with that knowledge?

I thought, "Wow, that was so effective—I think I'm going to make a space like that for myself." I started to create that, and I thought, "My now-husband is a composer, so I really should give some attention to his music studio, and Chloe's always picking on my son, so let's make a sanctuary for him as well." I really dug into creating what that might mean for each person, because it's incredibly personal.

At the time I was working with Gail Doby as my business coach. I flew out to Chicago to have a VIP day with her, and I told her what had happened. She said, "Lisa, this is such a powerful word. This came to you for more reasons than just your family. Let's take a broader look at the work that you do." She pulled up my portfolio, and as we started looking through it, she said, "Do you see what's in front of you? These are all sanctuaries."

You'd been doing it all along, but now you had a word for it.

She connected me with Nancy Greystone, a communications and writing coach, to help me develop a way to speak about

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LISA KAHN

this so that people could understand it. She also said, "If you're going to use this as a message for your business, you can't just talk about it—you need to live this." I flew back to Naples feeling super inspired—and then, of course, as the plane touched down, Chloe was back in the hospital, my ex-husband was freaking out and my accountant quit.

What came out of all of that was a very profound perspective shift: I realized that if I didn't have Chloe, I wouldn't even know what sanctuary means. If I didn't have my ex-husband, I wouldn't have been seeking this new way to infuse my business with meaning and purpose and passion. It was sort of like looking through a kaleidoscope, where with that one little turn, the whole pattern changes and everything looks different. I decided that we would turn our house and our design studio into a sanctuary lab.

What does that mean in practice?

We try all kinds of crazy things—paint colors, scents and candles, products and layouts and lights. We understand that when we create peace in the environment around us, it inspires peace in the environment inside us. That's really the bottom line. I think the word "sanctuary" inspires a sense of reverence. When we approach our spaces and our work and our life with reverence, that's a game changer. You aren't taking things for granted like, "That's my house. It's where I park my car, I put my groceries, I do my laundry and I go to bed and get up and take a shower to go to work again." Instead, it's a gorgeous, sacred temple to your soul. It's your launch pad for everything that is meaningful and all the inward work that we get to do.

The spaces you create are deeply personalized—but more broadly, what does sanctuary look like, and how do you find it for each client?

When I sit with people, I really listen. I'm listening to the words, but I'm also listening to the pauses. People will show you who they are if you can take the time to set yourself aside. I find that I can intuit the most magical design elements for that person—but I can't be sitting there thinking, "Oh, I have to be done in 15 minutes because I have another call." You really have to be present, and you have to show up fully. When you do that, you connect with people so much more richly and deeply. That, in itself, is another sanctuary-like experience. It's not about rushing through and trying to get the maximum amount done—it's about bringing a reverent quality to the experience.

> The home office of a waterfront home in Florida features natural elements and textures, hues that connect to the landscape and a sweeping outdoor view—all hallmarks of Lisa Kahn's commitment to building sanctuaries for her clients.



Sanctuary looks a little different for everyone, but the primary tenet is understanding that the natural world is the most healing, grounding and balancing force, and we always want to harness that. So when I enter a new space, I'm constantly looking outside: How are we referencing what is outside these walls, doors and windows? How do we blur the line between what is in and out? We take that very literally when we're working on spaces. I have done several prewar apartment renovations in New York, where it feels like there's only seven feet between one building and the next, and you have to lay on the floor to see the sky, so I am more intentional with the way I bring it in.

So you're creating a space to lay on the floor and look at the sky?

I could be. I have. You have the more macro sanctuary of an entire home that would be for a family, but then everyone's individual space is very tailored to them. I have tools I love—soft lighting, crystals and all sorts of natural, woven and organic materials because I'm in love with trees.

What happened after your epiphany by the lake? When did the work start to feel different?

When I started to approach it differently. When you look at each project as creating a container for all of the souls that are going to live or work or attend church here, it is an absolutely profound mental shift. When you look at it through that lens, nothing looks the same. This whole concept has really reconnected me with why I went into interior design in the first place, deepening into this beautiful ocean of possibility and purpose and passion.

Where is the opportunity when you look ahead?

I believe that people have never wanted to be connected with something bigger than themselves more than they do now. When I turned 50, I decided that my gift to mark that half-century would be to get a master's degree in transformational psychology. I am about six hours away from completing my degree. It has led me down the rabbit hole of ancient philosophers to understand how so many things have affected the development of human consciousness, and why we are where we are today with the current atmosphere of divisiveness. In understanding that, it has also helped to inform why sanctuary is so important.

How has this thinking reshaped the design side of your firm?

One thing that has changed is our space. We bought a studio building right before

the pandemic. Our rent here in Naples was crazy—it was doubling for a small, dank space—and I was like, “No.” The building we found was worn down, but we reimagined it, and now it is the most beautiful little spot. Being in a space that is a sanctuary every day makes it so much easier to create a sanctuary for other people, and my team gets to be steeped in this goodness all day. Another big change is the way I invest in myself, my team and my community. It has affected the way we spend our money, because we want to support local, like-minded businesses. Ultimately, it has been about walking the walk and turning a sanctuary mindset into a life philosophy rather than just a design philosophy. It's a kinder and gentler way of being in the world.

Is that something you can share and transmit to clients?

We do our best, but we have to meet people where they are. Some people are further along the path than others, and we are certainly not prescribing any particular thing. I show up in whatever manner speaks to clients and give them the very best version of sanctuary that I can, and that they can accept.

Is there an emotional component to vetting projects that's just as real as the financial component?

Absolutely. For example, if a couple comes in to interview and they're not nice to each other, I'm not going to take that job—I don't care how big it is. If they're going to be passive-aggressive or make petty comments, they're not really here to receive what we have to offer.

What was the financial impact of your change in focus?

When my daughter first started having seizures, my business was really struggling. I had just started to work with a business coach, but the firm's cash flow was abysmal, and I would often wake up wondering if I could make payroll that week. Sanctuary was a very new concept for me at this point, but I decided to reach for the one thing I knew of to turn the tide: gratitude. I went to a nice stationery store, bought 50 blank cards with a credit card—I didn't even have the money in my bank account to buy them—and made a list of 50 people who had positively impacted my business, then sat down and wrote an extremely personal note to each one. I didn't ask for anything, and I didn't bemoan anything; I just said, “I appreciate you so much,” and sent them all before Thanksgiving. The first few were hard to write because I was not feeling very grateful, but

gratitude is like a landslide, and all of a sudden it just started flowing. After that, it felt like the whole world had opened back up. Every single person responded, and by the following January, we had booked \$3 million in business. We have kept up that tradition to commemorate what a powerful energy shift it was. Every year before Thanksgiving, we do something similar, though now it's more of a gift. My list has grown, and there are a lot more people involved, but to me, that focus on gratitude is the concept of sanctuary at work in the world.



The Positive Thinker

After stints in customer service and retail, New York-based designer **Rayman Boozer** found his creative calling in interiors. Once he reframed his perspective to see opportunities instead of obstacles, he saw big-time results—including a magazine feature that jump-started his firm.

When you look back, what beliefs or practices were keeping you from reaching your goals?

People ask me all the time, “How did you get the money to start your business?” But it's not really about the money, it's about making the decision to do it and then following through. It sounds simple now, but I've had a lot of time to look back, and when you decide you're going to do something, at some point it's going to get hard. And when it gets hard, you can't stop—that's why people fail. They just stop trying. You have to go another way. If you can't go through the door, you go through the window.

For a long time, I felt like I was spinning my wheels. At every roadblock, I thought, “Why does this always happen to me?” But I came to the realization that life isn't happening *to* you, it's happening *for* you. As I started thinking differently, things started to get better.

What are some of the surprising avenues you took?

When I first opened my store in 1994, I didn't know what I was doing, so I did a lot of really weird stuff that most people



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