



Episode 57
Benefits of One Room
Challenge



**Mirjam: [00:00]**

Welcome to designer discussions with Maria, Jason and Mirjam. Today we have a very special guest. Her name is Linda Weinstein, and she is the founder and owner of the One Room Challenge.

Intro: [00:08]

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Mirjam: (00:47)

Linda, welcome to our podcast. I'm very excited to have you here because I think it's so important that everybody learn about the One Room Challenge. Like I had just mentioned before we hit record, but Maria actually was the one who introduced me to the One Room Challenge a couple of plus years ago, and I've been a big fan ever since. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and just give us a brief overview of what the One Room Challenge is. I believe it's been going on since 2011, right?

Linda: (01:25)

Yeah, this 10th year. Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here and talking with you. And the One Challenge started out of absolute necessity for myself. I needed motivation to finish one room in my house. And the more I went online and looked around, I kept seeing this common theme that nobody had a finished room. So I thought, well, finishing a room seems to be a challenge. So that's sort of how the name came to be. And over the years, it's evolved. It's in its 10th year today. It is the number one online interior design event. It takes place every spring and every fall. It's over eight weeks, and there have been over 6300 rooms transformed throughout the event.



Mirjam: (02:17)

Wow. Yeah, that's a lot of rooms.

Linda: (02:15)

I feel like I've lived every one of them.

Mirjam: (02:21)

I believe it is. I can only imagine how much work it is to pull all this together. But when you say all these participants, and it's like our audience, obviously we're speaking mostly to designers. So tell us a little bit about what kinds of designers sign up for the challenge. It's like, how many are professional interior designers? How many are DIYers? How many are just lifestyle?

Linda: (02:51)

Yes. I don't know the percentage mixes, but it is an entire mix of designers, I would say design influencers, who might not have customers, but they do. Design influences a living DIYers, regular people with social media accounts or website platforms that want to participate. And most recently, brand representatives. Some of my sponsors have had some of their people transform a room in their own home and play along, of course, using brand products.

Mirjam: (03:24)

Well, that's a good idea. Think about that sometimes. I thought it was interesting when you said designers and design influencers, because here on the podcast, we've had a number of conversations about being an influencer and what that means, and I'm so glad you brought that up. And I'd say the average of our listeners are designers that design for clients. Right. So they're in the business of interior design. And then there's, of course, the DIY influencers or the more hobby design influencers, but there's also professional design influencers, whose job it is to create content. Right, right.

**Linda: (04:15)**

I will say that there's a whole niche of designers, I mean, trained people who don't take on personal clientele anymore, but instead they might be hired to do, I don't know, brand room collaborations and show off certain items, be brand ambassadors, and create content that way. So absolutely.

Mirjam: (04:44)

Yeah. I think it's fascinating that you have the breadth of people coming, because do you still do the featured designers?

Linda: (04:51)

So this year's, the 10th anniversary year, and this year, we are not this year, we are celebrating the entire community. And so Apartment Therapy has partnered with me for the 10th anniversary year, and they are shining the largest spotlight on the greatest number of participants throughout the entire event and beyond.

Mirjam: (05:14)

That's amazing. Yes. And because before, just so people understand my question, but you used to have featured designers and guest designers, and the featured designers were ones that were sort of hand picked, right? Yeah.

Linda: (05:28)

So there would be 20 feature designers, and they would come out every Wednesday with their room plans. And then every Thursday, everyone who wanted to participate along, we call them the guests, they would come out on Thursdays and on social media and other platforms, the entire community just comes together under hashtag, one room challenge, and everyone mingles and supports one another. And so then yeah, this season, the celebration is the community that made it all possible.

Mirjam: (05:56)

I think that's beautiful. And Apartment Therapy is your media partner, right?



Linda: (06:00)

Yes.

Mirjam: (06:04)

Just so people understand. So if you participate in the one room challenge, you actually have the opportunity to get featured in the media as well. I don't assume that happens for everybody, but with the arrangement you have right now, you probably get more press than you ever have in the past.

Linda: (06:21)

Yes. Although the event itself has also now become a new place, a resource, really, for editors. And so, although Apartment Therapy is my media sponsor, there's been features all across the Internet. In fact, one of the participants or several of the participants and the guest participants have been featured on Clever, the offshoot from Architectural Digest and things. So it's everywhere.

Mirjam: (06:44)

That's amazing. It's just one more reason to participate, right?

Linda: (06:50)

Yeah. And I think it's a good reminder to designers that editors need content.

Mirjam: (06:56)

Yes. We always talk about that. It's like my soapbox.

Linda: (07:03)

Yes, they need content. They need pretty pictures. Before and afters are even better, especially if it's taken from the same perspective. It's kind of a lot of planning, but yeah, they need it. They need the stories and the opportunities to submit. Your work for editorial is huge.

Mirjam: (07:20)

Absolutely, I 100% agree. It's actually one of my questions related to that. So obviously potential press coverage is one benefit. It's like what are other reasons why people choose to participate? And I know Maria has her own story of what it brought to her when she participated. But tell me a little bit about why do people participate? What are the benefits that they experience?

**Linda: (07:50)**

Well, I like to think that the number one benefit is origin. It's the motivation to connect to the community and find the support that you need to finish a room. So that's what I'd like to think is the number one reason. You'd have to do a sampling of the participants to find out what exactly motivated them. But exposure, being introduced to brands, networking, meeting like minded people, it is lonely on social media, it is hard to connect. And now more than ever, when the algorithms continue to change, it is hard to be found, it is hard to be seen. I like to promote websites. I always encourage people to participate, preferably with a website. Get the traffic to your website and grow your email list and grow your own brand and your own name and your own identity and then push that out on your social channels. Brand collaborations is a big reason everyone registers.

Mirjam: (08:47)

Let's talk a little bit about that. And obviously that's mostly how you and I have been working together because a couple of my clients actually are sponsors of the One Room Challenge and it's been a great experience and we can talk about that a little bit later, but how is it set up? And I just want to make sure people understand how easy it can be to start collaborating with a brand. And I think the One Room Challenge offers a perfect platform for somebody who maybe has not been exposed to any kind of brand collaborations to give it a try. How does it all work?

**Linda: (09:30)**

Well. Because we're talking to mostly designers today. I would say that if you are going to attempt a room transformation through a One Room Challenge. Then the first and easiest place to start is with your own brand reps that you already know you're doing business with them. You know them. Their fabric lines. Wallpaper lines. Paint companies. And you would be surprised at how easy it is to have gifted product or product at a low cost opportunity for you in exchange for some exposure and while you transform your room and then finished images. So that would be the first place to start. The next place is if you've registered as a guest participant. Brands come in and are connected to the registered guest participants. The search is based on the brand needs, not the other way around. So it would be great to know that you need wallpaper, but the wallpaper company is going to let us know what they're looking for. Many times. It might be specific rooms. It might be geography, especially with supply chain issues these days. There might be just certain parts of the country that is just easier to get the materials to. It could be social media following size. That's absolutely one of the possibilities. And they will give us those parameters, and then we send out an outreach. And it's in the hands of the brand and the participants on whether or not they want to work together.

Mirjam: (11:27)

And I can tell from experience that both sides want to work together. And it's actually amazing how quickly the requests come in once you send out the offer. Everybody would like a new toilet seat bidet. Who knew?

Linda: (11:24)

We should talk about that. We should talk about that. I remember when you sent me an email saying, what do you think of a toilet seat?

Mirjam: (11:32)

And there are beautiful toilet seats. It's actually one of the very undervalued pieces of design in a bathroom.



Linda: (11:40)

I learned a lot.

Mirjam: (11:47)

People just don't think about it from my brand perspective. I'm like, your opportunity is amazing because even if you get to work with, I don't know, ten or 20 different participants, it's like the amount of great photography, the amount of great content, the amount of social media content and engagement you get is really hard to replicate anywhere else. So I think it works beautifully. And plus, and you're very generous in how you set it up. You don't try to control right. After you set it up. It's both up to the designers and the brands of how they want to collaborate and if they want to continue to collaborate after right.

Linda: (12:24)

How could you ever control that? And why would you want to?

Mirjam: (12:32)

You wouldn't want to.

Linda: (12:48)

That's the benefit. That's why you should be a sponsor. That's why you should join as a participant. Those are all built in.

Mirjam: (12:55)

Yeah, it's very true. And, like, the brands that I've introduced to your sponsorship, I'm like, they absolutely love it because people are so into it, and they create great quality work and designs and photography, and there's so much enthusiasm, and you get to piggyback on the whole buzz that surrounds the entire event. So it really is a great opportunity.

Linda: (13:23)

For thank you for saying that. That's good to hear.

Mirjam: (13:26)

Yeah, absolutely. No, I wanted to make sure we touch on that and the toilet seats. So I've just said, like, I think any brand who's looking for great content should become a sponsor of yours.

**Linda: (13:30)**

Yeah, I think the newest not the newest, the longest campaign that I've been working on is re educating the PR people and the brands that bigger is not better when it comes to social media following.

Mirjam: (13:50)

Yeah.

Linda: (13:54)

And just look at the images. Just scroll through people's speeds. Look what they're doing. Something will resonate. You will want to connect.

Maria: (14:02)

So when is the next round of the One Room Challenge. When's your launch date? When is everything due by and when should people start planning so that they can apply to participate?

Mirjam: (14:15)

And what should they consider when they are thinking about it anyway, right? What are the considerations that can how much time, how much money, things of that nature? Because there's all this chatter out there in the design world. So we want to clarify a few things.

Linda: (14:23)

The next one starts, it goes live on September 28, and once again, it is eight weeks, so it ends November 16. A Save the Date is going out this week to all the people that participated in the last one and then out on social media. And registration will most likely open within the next ten days. But registration bills, people tend to procrastinate. I'll just put that out there. The better opportunities happen for the people that come in earlier, just so you know, because when the brands want matching to happen, we only have what we have in front of us and not the FOMO people that joined the day before. So that's that part. But in terms of what to do to prepare for it, I would say create a design that feels realistic to accomplish. It's okay if it's a little aggressive on the reach and a push for yourself, I would say that you should lay out roughly how you feel the eight weeks will go and realistically how it will unfold. And then I would say prep well in advance. There are supply chain issues, there are stock issues. There are all kinds of things going on right now.

**Linda: (15:46)**

Gather as much, reach out to as many companies if you're going to, and that's your route. If you're designing for a client, make sure the client is okay. We have plenty of people that do real transformations for a client and then participate in the One Room Challenge with the clients project. So, again, just make sure all of that is in place and then you just got to roll with the stuff that's going to happen and pivot and the things that the mistakes that happen along the way. Trust the process. It's like any good design project, happy accidents will happen. And sometimes that's the greatest reward of the design. And connect with the community for sure. Reach out to your fellow participants. You will build relationships that will take you through a lot of opportunities later.

Maria: (16:32)

Linda I did do the One Room Challenge right at the beginning of COVID. It was like nothing else we could do, right?

Linda: (16:42)

Yeah.

Maria: (16:43)

And so I did my outdoor porch. I bought all the furniture and decorated it up and all that kind of stuff. And it was just like, so nice as a designer to have someone give me training wheels on what the structure is for posting to social media and interacting in social media and the frequency that would be expected to execute something in a timeline, all of that. Like, that recipe was perfect. I think the only thing that was missing for me is I didn't register how important the video was.

Linda: (17:16)

Yeah.

Maria: (17:17)

Even though I didn't understand how important video was at the beginning of the pandemic, and it was vital. It was, like, the number one thing for engagement and social media growth at that time.

Linda: (17:31)

How is the space today? Are you using it?

**Maria: (17:32)**

Well, we actually ended up selling that house, but I do have all the same furniture at a different house, and it looks great, and I love it, and I use it.

Linda: (16:42)

And so then the content, though, did you put it also on a website? Did you put it up to Pinterest? Did you maximize all the opportunities for yourself?

Maria: (17:49)

So I did. I tried just plugging a couple of, like, the professional photos and some of the DIY stuff, and I did add some of it on to the blog, and I did get a lot more traffic, and I did meet some people, and I felt like that was what was most compelling. It's just kind of fun when you're, like, literally the night that you can upload your content, the night that you're sitting there and you're waiting for it to open, and you're like, Is it open yet? Is it open yet? And then you like, now on your cell phones, everybody you know who's doing the One Room Challenge. Are you in? Are you in?

Linda: (18:26)

We should say that what she's talking about is that everybody who participates, once a week, they put their weekly update on the One Room Challenge website. And so it opens up after midnight, and we don't give the time anymore, because literally, at one time, we gave the time, and we would say what time it opens, and it crashed. So we don't give the time. It's just some time after midnight. And so everyone has to keep hitting refresh. But it doesn't matter. Come the next day, come the next morning. It's okay.

Maria: (18:47)

You're like this.

Linda: (18:51)

You don't have to stay up past your bedtime if you don't want to.



Maria: (19:00)

Oh, I did.

Jason: (19:04)

Like, you were taking a test. Like, It's open. Let's go.

Linda: (19:07)

It's open.

Maria: (19:07)

I mean, it was like and I'd have people and everybody would be like, hey, we were on a group chat, and we're like, Is it open yet? Did it open? Is it open yet? And everybody would be like, I don't know. I'm over here. I'm trying to see if I can get my stuff in there. Because if you got into that first group of people, everybody would get back to you. You'd get all of these.

Linda: (19:26)

You'd probably get more visits.

Maria: (19:28)

Yeah. As a designer who participated in the One Room Challenge. I highly recommend this for anyone who's thinking they want to have brand partnerships or do influencer style social media presence work. Because this is the One opportunity we have where someone already has the structure set up for us. Where we participate in an active structure that is going to benefit us through our social media and help us to get that one room finished in our home and have a real creative palette to work with. And then we also get the one and only opportunity to pull the audience, ask them, which color do you like more? We get to really start to interact with our social media more, like an Instagram influencer would versus how it is when we work with our interior design clients. You will create relationships with people, and you will learn so much more about yourself during this process.

Linda: (20:25)

And I would say that when designers share tips along the way, those are probably some of the most bookmarked posts out there. That's what everyone wants to know. They want to know, from a professional point of view, why they did what they did, how they did what they did, and the mistakes. And to connect with a designer who's truly honest about the fact that something went wrong, it makes you more relatable.



Jason: (20:50)

I would ask, where is the future of the One Room Challenge? Where do you want to go from here?

Linda: (20:58)

So far, it's been going at a really nice growth rate, and it's reaching more people. And I'm staying really flexible to all of the changes that come along. And who would have known that we were going to shut down for two years like we did and things? So I'm not sure.

Mirjam: (21:17)

Keeping all your options open? Yeah, perfect. I love that. So if somebody is all fired up now and wants to go sign up, where do they go?

Speaker 4 (21:27)

You follow the one room challenge instagram account. That's where the announcements usually happen first. You will know when registration opens. People start chattering about it when it happens, and then we start reposting and it starts building. But it is happening. It's happening September 28.

Mirjam: (21:44)

So it's not right around the corner. It really is. Thank you so much, Linda, for coming on and talking to us about the One Room Challenge. We highly encourage everybody to participate and just give it a try. Maria said it's a lot of fun and you learn a lot from it. And registration is open right now, so go sign up.

Linda: (22:09)

Thank you so much. This was fun.

Outro: (22:11)

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