

*She Said/She Said Podcast With Laura Cox Kaplan*

*Episode 282: How following your creative passions can lead to incredible success!*

*Guest: Paloma Contreras, interior designer + bestselling author*

*Episode 282 produced in collaboration with The Southern Coterie*

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:06](#)):

Hi, I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Welcome to She Said, she Said Podcast. Here on this podcast, we talk about the building blocks and the micro habits that help us create real and lasting influence. What do I mean by that? Well, we're talking about the kind of influence that helps you achieve your goals and whatever it is in life that you want to accomplish, but perhaps most importantly, it's the type of influence that helps you create real impact, and that enables you to truly thrive.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:45](#)):

Hey, friend, welcome to episode 282 of She Said, she Said Podcast. This episode is the third in our collaboration series this year with the Southern coterie. If you have missed any part of this series, I hope you'll go back because these women are phenomenal and there's so much wisdom and perspective and really thoughtful advice packed into each episode. So, the series starts with episode 280 with Sophia Deir, who's the founder of Mont, and then continues with benefit auctioneer and confidence expert, and now entrepreneur, bestselling author, many, many, many adjectives to describe her, the fabulous Lydia Fant. And now, today I'll be talking to the amazing Paloma Contreras. She's of course a Houston-based interior designer, but much beyond that, she's also a bestselling author of two fantastic design books, her first, which is called Dream Design, Liv, and her latest, which came out in 2023, the new classic Home Modern Meets Traditional Style.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:59](#)):

Paloma has an especially interesting career pivot story because she did not start her career in design. In fact, she started out as a high school Spanish teacher. But the way in which she has built this multifaceted design business, I find absolutely fascinating because it's, it really embodies her approach to continuous learning, to challenging yourself and to just being willing to try things. One of the things that especially jumped out to me that I think will really resonate with you is this idea that sometimes we get in our heads that just because we don't have the particular credential or the particular degree or can't possibly do that thing or be in that industry, especially if it's something that's very different from what you've been doing, Paloma really shows us that could not be further from the truth, but that there has to be a strategy for how you go about filling that gap.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([03:03](#)):

If it's not through a traditional education approach, you have to have some kind of an approach. But anyway, she explains that so beautifully. I think there's so much about this conversation that is really inspiring, including great advice for one of the areas of interior design that I get hung up on, which is how accessorizing, like once you have the space pulled together, what's the best way to go about adding accessories? So she shares all of that. Also advice on collaborations and partnerships and client selectivity. How do you know when a client is a good fit and is gonna, it's gonna be a good match. And so much more friend give this episode a listen. And as always, I'd love to hear your feedback. So please be sure to let, to let me know. For now though, here is episode 282 with the absolutely fabulously talented and creative Paloma Contreras. Paloma, welcome to She Said. She said,

Paloma Contreras ([04:08](#)):

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Thank you so much for having me, Laura.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([04:10](#)):

Well, I'm so happy to have you. I loved having an opportunity to get to know you a little bit during the Southern C a few weeks back. So it's really a thrill to have a chance to chat with you directly, to dive in a little deeper into your story and also share that part of your story with our listeners. So that is where I'd love to start the conversation. You are, I mean, you have an amazing background and story of success, which I was so fascinated by just your body of work. But when you told me that you did not originally start out in design, I was like, okay, wow, that is really an interesting element of your story. Why don't we start there? You didn't start in design. Where did you start?

Paloma Contreras ([04:58](#)):

Well, I've had quite a long and winding road. You're very kind. Thank you. I actually started out as a teacher, so I majored in languages. I majored in Spanish and Italian studies. And when I was getting set to graduate, I wasn't really quite sure where my life would take me or what my career would be, and so I kind of just fell into teaching because it felt familiar and safe and like something that I could do and enjoy. I loved languages. They were my first love. So I did that for four and a half years, and I found myself very quickly feeling creatively stifled in that position. There were lots of things that I enjoyed about teaching, but just as many things that just didn't feel like a true fit. They didn't sit well with my soul. And I was struggling to find, you know, what that would be for me.

Paloma Contreras ([05:53](#)):

And it just so happens that around the time that I entered what would be my last year as a teacher, I didn't know it yet, but we bought our first house and I was looking for inspiration. I'd always loved design but I never really knew that it was something I could do as a career. So that wasn't even on my radar to pursue as a career. But at that time, I just started seeking out, you know, ideas and there were literally a handful of blogs at the time. This was 2006, I believe, and none of them really resonated with my style. They were all sort of very specific and different aesthetics. They leaned a little bit more like Scandinavian and or just, you know, different. So I also simultaneously was looking for a creative outlet, and I knew a few people that had started writing blogs, people that I'd known throughout my life that had moved away after college, and they were, you know, just writing personal entries about their new life in New York or moving abroad or whatever it may be. And I thought, well, that's a fun idea. It seems like, you know, journaling just in a different platform. And so I gave that a shot and I didn't set out to be a design blogger or to make anything of it. It simply was that creative outlet that I was seeking. So over time it started to take a very design a focus and design really. And that was very organic.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([07:25](#)):

And, and was that largely because that was sort of what you were working on? You've, you'd bought this house and you were kind of in that space. Is that kind of why?

Paloma Contreras ([07:32](#)):

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Yeah. I was in a design mindset at the time because I was furnishing this house and looking for ideas. And so I was coming across all these, these things that I was finding inspiring and old books and magazines and whatever. And so I just started sharing that and I had like three readers at the time, <laugh>. So again, like there wasn't a focus, there wasn't any kind of intention. I was just finding a channel in which I could be creative Yeah. And find my voice again. And then over time blogs started to gain traction better Homes and Gardens Magazine ran a monthly column in the mid two thousands about like, with featuring a blogger of the month Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And they selected me one month and I saw my readership spike, which was very exciting. And it also gave me the confidence to leave my teaching job. Again, I didn't really have a set plan as to what I would do, but I was starting to have brands reach out to me with these like, creative partnerships and whatnot, which we now know has influencer partnerships. But that was all very new at the time too, so I was able to do that. I supplemented my income by tutoring some kids in Spanish after school, and I spent my days blogging. Wow. And that was really the beginning of it all. Is

Laura Cox Kaplan ([08:51](#)):

That how you, so, you know, I, I'm, I think I'm sort of fixated on this idea of design training and, and whether, how important is that? I mean, it sounds like it, I mean, obviously it's something that you can learn, but is that, was that kind of the process that you went through to learn the fundamentals or sort of how did that come about?

Paloma Contreras ([09:12](#)):

Well, that's a very interesting question, and it's obviously something that's incredibly important. And everybody learns differently. You know, I, when people come to me now and they see the trajectory that I've had, and they want to make a career pivot, they always ask me, should I go to design school? And it's never about idea. I mean, remember, my, my background is in education, and so I'm never gonna think that education is a bad idea. It just, for me, at the time, it didn't make sense to go to design school, Uhhuh <affirmative>. And I actually held a variety of positions in the design world or industry prior to starting my own firm. And because I'd written this blog for a very long time before starting my firm in 2013, I'd met a lot of amazing, talented people working in the design space. People that I looked to as icons, really people who became mentors to me and who were very important in helping me shape not only an aesthetic, but really in terms of helping me to understand the business side of things, which is what's so important.

Paloma Contreras ([10:20](#)):

So you're not gonna learn that in design school. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> you will learn a lot of fundamental things space planning. You're not gonna learn about the history of design per se, or various furniture styles and periods and, you know, all of the important players of the last 150 years. You're not gonna learn that in a classroom setting. That has to be something that you find a hunger for within and seek out on your own. And so, you know, blogs aren't what they were 10, 15 years ago at this point, but at one time there was such a wealth of information that one could glean and you could go back and visit these incredible interiors, you know, from the 1920s and thirties and forties, and really get to know various artistic styles and the important designers of the last 100 years. So my education, I always say, is

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a unique one. I don't have a formal education in design, but I have my own special brand, my organic version of an education and design that, you know, money can't buy. And I've had the very special privilege of learning from some of the best in our industry.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([11:41](#)):

Yeah. You, you said something so interesting that I had not, I had not really dialed into until you said it just the way that you said it, which, which is the fact that you had a background in education, that you understand how other people learn and you no doubt understand how you learn and how you were going to process information. Like that's a really interesting element of your story that I hadn't really focused on. That's so fascinating.

Paloma Contreras ([12:08](#)):

Well, you know, I always consider myself a, a voracious student of life. You know, I, I think that once you feel like you've stopped learning, you really have to look within, because there's always something new to learn. Yeah. There's a new skill, a new interest, like all kinds of things. And if we're not learning, we're not growing. So that is just my personality type. I love to seek out information, to learn new things, to learn from people. One of my greatest joys in life is to see someone who is passionate about what they do. That can be, you know, making wine in the Napa Valley or being Bruno Mars and performing on stage or an interior designer to just do what you were the to, to be able to live out the gift that you were given. And to do it in its highest form is something so joyous that I love to see.

Paloma Contreras ([13:01](#)):

And of course, you know, you want to seek out more about those people and how they've achieved what they've achieved. So, yeah, I mean, it's just important in general, I think in life, regardless of what you do or where you want to be, to be very in tune with yourself and your personality type, the type of learner that you are, how, you know, how you go about studying something new. And an education and, and or background in education has certainly been helpful to me in terms of educating myself and my eye as an interior designer. And also in terms of running a business, running a design firm, running a store, having employees that I'm responsible for, dealing with all kinds of personality types in the day to day. You know, those are invaluable skills that I carry forward and that I even use, you know, in my day to day, really outside of work with my own two and a half year old daughter, I, I see myself like reverting back to some of those skills that I had in the classroom with her.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([14:04](#)):

I love that. I, I love everything about that. It, it's such a beautiful story. I'm wondering too sort of what's your, what your infrastructure was like. I mean, I know you're close to your parents who are, who are helpful to you in caring for your daughter as you're running this business. But maybe talk a little bit about how you grew up and was there a concern on their part when you said, you know what, I've had it with teaching, I'm gonna try something really different. Kinda what was the reaction and was that hard to make that shift?

Paloma Contreras ([14:38](#)):

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You know, it's interesting. I had a wonderful childhood. My parents were always so loving and supportive and basically gave me the confidence to believe that could do anything I set my mind to. I am a first generation American. My parents are immigrants, and they, they've been here forever. My dad came here from Mexico in the sixties, and my mom followed him in the seventies when they got married. But you know, I, I'm the first of of my family to grow up American. And that was always sort of interesting growing up because you always feel a little bit like an outsider because you have this whole culture in your family and at home that maybe, you know, is not your experience at school. So for, you know, for better or for worse, sometimes I look back on it and I think, well, it, I could have maybe had more guidance and my parents did the best that they could do, and they provided me with everything that they could.

Paloma Contreras ([15:34](#)):

But they weren't, they weren't the type of parents that would like, sit down with me and be super analytical and say, well, you have to major in X, Y, or Z in order to maintain this standard of living or whatever. It was just like, great, that's what you wanna do. Wonderful. They were just proud of me, regardless of what I did. Yeah. I still don't think they fully understand what my day to day entails, and you know, what I really do. But yeah, they're amazing and they are very present in our lives and help a ton with Margot and could not be better grandparents. But yeah, I mean, it was a, a loving, wonderful childhood. But I think, you know, my daughter will have a different experience in that I will probably be more hands on in terms of like really guiding her and steering her in certain directions and just being able to have access to certain things.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([16:22](#)):

Yeah. Well, given all that you've accomplished, my guess is you were probably a pretty extraordinary child in the first place. And so maybe if you said, okay, I'm gonna, I'm gonna do X, Y, or Z, your parents were like, okay, <laugh> sounds okay to us, <laugh>. Well, I

Paloma Contreras ([16:38](#)):

Was, I was always studious. I was a quiet, shy child. I was always creative and I was a very good student, and I always wanted to make them proud. So,

Laura Cox Kaplan ([16:47](#)):

Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. Oh, I love that. I love that. Okay, so let's fast forward a bit. I know you took a number of interesting roles, including a role as the marketing director for visual comfort, but you had never done marketing sort of officially <laugh>. So how did, how did that particular position come about?

Paloma Contreras ([17:08](#)):

Well, if there's any commonality in my backstory, it's that I'm not afraid, afraid to try new things. And I really just believe in, you know, going all in and giving things a shot. And if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. You've learned something. But oftentimes, thankfully, it has. So I actually, after I left teaching, I

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was tutoring the son of the owner of Visual Comfort. My husband worked for the company. He's been there for almost 20 years. So he was one of my children's students that I would tutor. And so I got to know Andy, the owner that way. And I remember getting a phone call from him one day and he said, you know, I've been looking for somebody to run my marketing department, a marketing director, and I've interviewed all of these people, but they can't even market themselves.

Paloma Contreras ([18:02](#)):

Like, they don't know what's going on. Would you come in and meet with me? And I said, well, you do know <laugh> <laugh>. I have no marketing experience. I am a teacher, a former teacher, but I would be happy to meet with you. And he would, I mean, I don't remember the full conversation, but he was very kind and I think smart. He's obviously a brilliant man and a trailblazer in many ways. And the fact that he could see in me this girl who was formerly teaching and sitting at his kitchen counter a few nights a week, tutoring his child in like Spanish one but blogging in the daytime, he knew about what I was doing that he would see potential in me. Yeah. In, in terms of marketing efforts. And that he saw sort of where that was all headed even before I could really and he took a chance on me. So he offered me the job, and I became marketing director, the first marketing director they'd had at that point, they were almost in their 25th year as a company, which is remarkable because they've grown tremendously at that point. And now it's this incredible juggernaut of a company in the,

Laura Cox Kaplan ([19:10](#)):

It's amazing. Yeah.

Paloma Contreras ([19:11](#)):

However many years, dozen years since then. But I was there for a few years and got to work very closely with a lot of their brand partners, their are licensors and we're talking about, you know, some of the top design talent in, in the space. And that was an education in and of itself. Not only being around these creative people, but also getting to see the product side of the business and how something goes from an idea or a concept to an actual deliverable at a market. And then all of, you know, the press that comes around that, the marketing piece, the public relations piece, getting to know all of the editors and the industry at the time, and giving them tours of our showroom and, you know, working with them on stories and things. So it was an incredible opportunity.

Paloma Contreras ([20:04](#)):

I made a lot of solid relationships at that at that position or in that position. And we also got to we launched the errand collaboration at the time, so that was brand new, and that was sort of like my last big initiative before I decided to go out on my own. And yeah, I, I loved my job there. It's all come full circle. Like I said, my husband's been there for 20, almost 20 years, and I launched a design a lighting collection. I designed a lighting collection with them that we introduced a couple of years ago, and we continue to introduce new products. So it's a relationship that has really come full circle, and that taught me so much.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([20:44](#)):

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That's amazing. That's absolutely amazing. So, I'd love to pivot a bit and talk a bit more about your design work and sort of as you began to launch your business, you left Visual Comfort. Yes. You launched a design business officially. Was it challenging for you to figure out how to, how to, how to figure out how much your time and effort was worth, and was that hard? And how did you go about that process?

Paloma Contreras ([21:11](#)):

It was extremely difficult. I had no idea what I was doing, to be perfectly frank. You know, I, I had the opportunity when I decided to leave, I'd had the itch to go back out on my own. 'cause I'd freelanced for a long time prior to Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> having that position. And I, I enjoyed my job there, but I, I'm just an entrepreneur at heart, and I was itching to go do my own thing again. And I had an opportunity, you know, in the years leading up to that, people had asked me to help them here and there with paint colors or with a room in their house or whatever, you know, friends and acquaintances. But this was a full project that sort of fell into my lap through a friend of a friend. And I thought, well, this is the perfect opportunity, the perfect time to, to hang my shingle.

Paloma Contreras ([21:55](#)):

And so I, I had a contract, and again, like I called upon all of those relationships that I had, and I had some people I could confide in and ask questions to. And they helped me sort of figure out like, what, what should go in a contract and sort of a framework for the design process and how much I should be charging and that kind of thing. But I gave away my time for so, so long, and that's not to say I didn't charge for it, but I was afraid to charge Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> for the amount of time I was actually spending on these projects. You know, there was so much money left on the table because I was embarrassed to ask for payments Yeah. For my services. And that's something that to this day, like, I still struggle with a little bit, and we're obviously in a much different place in terms of the caliber of projects that we're taking on, and just the level of experience that we have in our services that we offer.

Paloma Contreras ([22:47](#)):

But I still get that sort of nervousness from time to time when we're sending out a proposal in terms of asking what we're worth. Yeah. But it was, it was challenging. I, you know, again, going back to the question that I mentioned at the beginning, when people, when I meet people and they say, I have a similar story, or I'm thinking about leaving. I love design, I'm leaving, I wanna leave my job and pursue this. I always encourage people not to follow my path. It worked out for me, and I wouldn't change it for the world, but it wasn't the path of least resistance. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, you know, it was certainly difficult. I absolutely encourage people to work for someone else, learn as much as you can under someone else's tutelage. You know, glean all of the information, all the knowledge that you can from them.

Paloma Contreras ([23:37](#)):

There's no better teacher than experience. And again, you know, you can be in a classroom, you can learn the fundamentals of design, but understanding the dynamics of a client designer relationship, what it's like working with contractors, the different phases of a job, like all of these things are, are not

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something that you will learn in school. You really have to be working in a firm Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> to understand how all of that works, to understand, you know, how you bill and when you bill, and why you bill the bottom line, you know, understanding the business side of things. And then of course, there's a whole logistical piece, like getting from concept to installation is a whole nother animal. And I, I mean, I made mistakes, costly mistakes. There was blood, sweat, tears, all of those things, you know, and, and I'm better for it.

Paloma Contreras ([24:28](#)):

And, you know, experience is a wonderful teacher and mistakes are an even better teacher. But if you, if you have the opportunity to intern for someone, I would absolutely encourage that. Anybody thinking of making a career pivot or, you know, getting started in their design career, that they do that and they do it for a while, you know, because it takes several years to really get your footing and understand what works and what doesn't. And it's still something, you know, I'm in a design trust group with several well-known, established designers who many of whom have been in business longer than I have. And we all struggle. You know, we're constantly refining and sort of figuring out like what works and what doesn't, what works for the client, what works for the firm, you know, updating processes and like reassessing what we should be charging or all of those things. You know, it's, it's a constant battle.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([25:22](#)):

Yeah. You, you you referred to that as a design trust group. Is that like a mentor group, or is that, is that a term of art? I've not heard that.

Paloma Contreras ([25:30](#)):

Yeah. It's a, it's a, it's a mentor group, essentially. There's, I think, six or seven of us, and we all were sort of craving some sort of connection in terms of, you know, really having a group a, a confidential group that we could meet with on a regular basis and just hash out like the nitty gritty of our day-to-day and talk shop. And, you know, we all face the same issues, but the, the challenge in design is that it's not standardized. So we all have a, a similar process, I would say, but the way that we present things might be different. The way that we charge is different. It's not the same from one firm to the other. And so that can be challenging for us to, to know like, am I doing things correctly? Am I profitable enough? And like, does this work for us?

Paloma Contreras ([26:23](#)):

Does this work for our clients? And I think, you know, as a result, sometimes there can be mistrust from clients because everybody does things differently. And so we established this group we just started, I think right before the new year was our first call, but these are people that I've known for a long time and that I admire and respect. And we just, every month we sort of very organically come up with a topic of discussion that's like very much on our minds, you know, in, in December I think it was the topic of like client or, or employee bonuses and Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, you know, compensation and things like that. Like all of the things that as a small business owner, there's not a handbook for, right. And so it's nice to have a group of people that you can use as a sounding board. So that's essentially what that is.



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Laura Cox Kaplan ([27:08](#)):

I love that. I absolutely love that. Let's talk a little bit about you know, and I, I think whether the person listening is a designer or in any line of work partnerships and collaborations and working with clients and understanding maybe selectivity, like you're at a level at this point, you don't have to take every project that comes in the door. In fact, you wanna be really selective and prioritize what you're, what you're, what you're working on, and what's most meaningful for you and for the client. Let's talk a little bit about how you go through that process of determining who's gonna be a good client, excuse me, and also maybe red flags for people that you're like, Hmm, this is probably not gonna work out so well.

Paloma Contreras ([27:51](#)):

Well, I, I would say for anyone listening, whether you are a designer, design enthusiast, or someone who's looking to hire a designer, you should always interview more than one person. And you're simultaneously interviewing one another as designer and client, because you both should want to establish that it's going to be a good fit. And so there's several markers that we look for. Of course, you know, we, at this point, we take on primarily just larger projects because we want to be able to make the biggest impact that we can on a house. And if we're just doing a one room, you know, that's, that's not possible. But it's about really making a, a, an impact in terms of the design and the way that the clients live within the home. And then of course, we're a small team and we've moved really strategically in the last couple of years towards a model of doing fewer, bigger, better projects, rather than taking on, you know, 16 different projects at one time.

Paloma Contreras ([28:52](#)):

We would rather have eight really focused, strong projects that we're excited about. Creatively. That's a big part of it, you know, is that's, is it something that I feel inspired by? Is it a beautiful home? Is it an exciting project? The biggest factor for me is if the people are nice and if they seem like someone I would vibe with and want to spend time with, because chances are, we're gonna be together for at least a year, if not longer. If it's new construction, we may be together for three years. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And so, you know, is this someone that I would want to go to dinner with at the end of a very long and stressful day? That's a big question that I ask. And just, you know, are they respectful of my team as well? Because we've had in, in the past people who were very nice to me, but when I'm not around, they're not so nice to my team.

Paloma Contreras ([29:43](#)):

And I think that's very telling of a person's character. But again, you know, you just want it fit. Like with anything, whether it's an employee, a boyfriend, a client, a designer fit is the biggest factor. You know, obviously you want the business model to align, you know, you as a designer, you would hope that the budget makes sense in order for you to be able to create, you know, your vision do, is there enough clay for me to mold my masterpiece? And that's sometimes a difficult conversation because even when something isn't necessarily in line with our minimum, it's still a lot of money, of course. But we know, I always, I, I always tell people, it's sort of like when you go to the grocery store and you go to the checkout, you're always spending so much more than you imagined you would <laugh>, right? It adds up so quickly. And that's even more true in a house. You know, a house just needs a lot of stuff. And so, you

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know, the budget adds up very, very quickly, but fit primarily more than anything, is a, a big, big key factor. Is it somebody that you enjoy, that you respect, that you feel inspired by?

Laura Cox Kaplan ([30:49](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I absolutely love that. Okay. I wanna tap into your expertise a little bit and get your advice. One of the most challenging things, and because I have just done this big project and I had lots of help in, in doing it, but we are at the part where, you know, we have sort of the basic fundamentals, but now it's time to continue to, to layer. And I have, you know, more or less blank shelves you can't really see. 'cause I filled in a few things just because I was talking to you today, <laugh>. But essentially nothing's on the shelves. And so figuring out how to create that additional layer and the texture that comes with accessories and how to select things. Do you have any sort of hard and fast or tried and true rules for how to go about that?

Paloma Contreras ([31:32](#)):

I do. And in fact, I, I really went into that in great detail in my first book, *Dream Design Live*, which I know you were flipping through this morning.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([31:39](#)):

Love your book. Yeah,

Paloma Contreras ([31:40](#)):

Thank you. That was that was really written in a more didactic sort of approach than the second book, which is, you know, more of a classic Mm-Hmm. Like design tome. Mm-Hmm. But I, I would say that, you know, that accessories phase is where a house really starts to come to life, because the foundational pieces are obviously extremely important, but it's through the accessories and the art that you add your personality and you tell your story as the homeowner. So you know, that's when you want to bring in books that are of interest to you. Framed family photographs I love in, in shelves, for instance, I love finding small pieces of art that I often collect on my travels. I'm leaning them in bookshelves. I think for shelves it's super important to have varying heights. There's a pyramid rule that I follow. And so you'd sort of, you know, you want things at multiple levels.

Paloma Contreras ([32:33](#)):

So there's always gonna be sort of like a triangular configuration, so something stacked on top of books. You want them to go in different directions as well. Some may be horizontal, some may be standing vertically on their spines, and that just becomes a more dynamic and interesting configuration. But just bringing things in that have meaning to you, that tell the story of your life, your travels, that I think is always going to be the most interesting and the most successful addition to an interior, because it's what really separates it from your neighbor's home or, you know, anything else. But I think art and accessories can be super impactful.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([33:12](#)):

*She Said/She Said Podcast With Laura Cox Kaplan*

*Episode 282: How following your creative passions can lead to incredible success!*

*Guest: Paloma Contreras, interior designer + bestselling author*

*Episode 282 produced in collaboration with The Southern Coterie*

Yeah, I love that. I absolutely love that. So I'd love to for you to talk just a bit about the creative process. It's such a big part of what you do. I'm a big believer that, you know, creativity and embracing the things that resonate with you is so important. No matter what you do with your time, whether you're a lawyer or a banker, designer, a podcaster doesn't make any difference. So maybe talk a little bit about those sources that you go to or the ways that you fuel your creativity, where inspiration comes from, et cetera, maybe, and also like reading material that you have Mm-hmm. <Affirmative> run across recently that you especially resonate with.

Paloma Contreras ([33:52](#)):

Well there are so many things that I find inspiration from. I, it's really, it's all around us. I think the difference is being in tune with oneself and wanting, being open to finding it. It can be anything. It can be a, a flower on, a vine on, you know, while you're out walking. It can be anything to me, as cliché and trite as it may sound, travel is the most inspiring thing. You know, there's nothing better than getting out of your day to day surroundings and allowing your eye to travel. As Joanna Reland very famously said all of those years ago, the I has to travel. And it's so true because you're exposing yourself to different styles of architecture and different cultures. And it might be something as subtle and simple as the light somewhere. The light in Los Angeles is so different than it is in New York, or if you've ever been to Paris in the summer, it's, you know, beautiful sun.

Paloma Contreras ([34:54](#)):

You have beautiful sunsets at like 9:45 PM mm-hmm, <affirmative>. And just the way that that casts onto the limestone on the buildings, that is inspiring. And you know, now that I'm delving into product design, that is very important to me, the travel, because I'm seeing things that are super exciting. I'm coming across antiques and vintage and it may be like I, I see a doorknob that inspires a shape for a light fixture or a floor pattern executed in marble and a palace from the 17 hundreds. That would be a fabulous decorative trim for your curtains. Like, it's just anything and everything can be inspiring. Yeah. Nature of course is so inspiring.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([35:37](#)):

Yeah. I, I I I, I absolutely love that. Maybe anything that you're working on right now that you're especially excited about, will there be a book three that you're envisioning perhaps?

Paloma Contreras ([35:50](#)):

It's not officially in the works, but it's certainly something that I would love to do and can certainly imagine doing. I've obviously given thought to, you know, what projects would end up in a third book if that were to happen in a couple of years. I'm working on a lot of new lighting designs at the moment, and that's sort of been a focus in the last few weeks. So very energized by that. And we're working on several new projects across the country that we are really inspired by and, and excited about.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([36:21](#)):

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And your store in Houston is doing well, Paloma and Co and you have a, have a website as well. I've purchased a few things from your website, which is so exciting and so fun.

Paloma Contreras ([36:31](#)):

Thank you. Yes. The store is so fun to do. It's so rewarding creatively to come across new artists and artisans continuously and to bring them into the shop. So that's another fun creative muscle to flex.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([36:46](#)):

Yeah. That's awesome. Well, I'm delighted to talk to you today and on behalf of She Said, she Said, and The Southern C, we're really excited to have you participate in this collaboration series. So it's really, really fun to have a chance to connect with you today.

Paloma Contreras ([37:01](#)):

Thank you so much. This is such a fun continuation of the wonderful experience we had at the Southern C. It was my first time, and it was really, truly unlike anything that I've ever attended or that I've ever experienced. And I have found myself consistently connecting with a lot of the people that I met since we were there a few weeks ago. And I'm so, so pleased and so grateful to be able to continue the conversation and the relationship with you. Laura, thank you for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([37:28](#)):

Hey, friend, thanks for listening. I would love to hear your feedback on which of Paloma's advice resonated most with you. And one of the best ways to share that feedback is by leaving me a nice review. Those reviews actually help me as I'm creating content because it helps me know which themes are really resonating with you. Plus it also signals to the podcast algorithm that she said, she said, podcast is something that you value. So if you have a minute, I would be really, really grateful if you would leave me a nice review and just tell me what was it about the episode that you really liked, or some feedback on how we can improve. I'd really love to hear in the meantime, on behalf of She Said, she Said Podcast and The Southern C. I'm so delighted that you joined me for this episode. I hope that you found it to be a good investment in you. Take care, friend and I will talk to you again next week.