

AN
ARTIST
LIVES HERE

**INSPIRATION
EVERYWHERE**
with Lori Siebert



Wendy Conklin

CHAIR WHIMSY

Photography by Abby Grace



Wendy Conklin lives just outside of Austin in Round Rock, Texas. Her home decorating adventure was sparked by a favorite children's book that gave permission to people living on a neat street to finally live out their dreams in their own homes. This has now become Wendy's obsession.

"My house is me and I am it. My house is where I like to be and it looks like all my dreams."

— Daniel Pinkwater,
The Big Orange Spot

Long ago when I was a classroom teacher, *The Big Orange Spot* was my favorite picture book. It's a story about a bird that drops a can of orange paint on Mr. Plumbean's house. That happy accident sparked a creative revolution on what was formerly a neat street. Over several nights, Mr. Plumbean took the liberty and transformed his home into his dreams, to his neighbors' dismay ... at first. Then, his actions inspired each of his neighbors to follow suit, to express their dreams and creativity on their homes, too. The transformation process took time and thought. The bird who dropped the paint — *no one knows why* — gave the homeowners on that street permission to be creative. That's what I hope *my home* will do for you.

Believe it or not, my home used to be filled with neutral colors. I was trying to be like everyone else, but it never served me very well or really made me happy. And perhaps I worried about what others would think if I really went for it with my home design. Looking back, that seems so absurd to me ... *I'm the one living here — shouldn't I do what I want?*



I'm a chair stylist by trade, and I'm passionate about makeovers and bold fabrics. I believe that chairs can be art, too, and the fabric makes all the difference.

The very first upholstery project I did for my own home was the settee that sits perfectly in the nook at my kitchen table. I took a risk using the pink paisley fabric, not really knowing if it would work out in the long run, but I'm so glad I did. I am constantly changing out pillows and chairs to freshen up the space, but the settee will stay the same. The pink paisley behaves like a neutral and goes with everything I put with it. That settee was my first ever "Mr. Plumbean move" in my own home, and it sparked my own creative revolution. Because the space is so inspiring to me, it functions as my workspace for the design work that I do outside of my chair studio.

From LORI SIEBERT:

I have always swooned over the chairs that Wendy Conklin creates. I even had the honor of collaborating with her on creating some floral fabric patterns for a chair series. And, I have one in my own home!!

Wendy's style is so colorful and joyful. The way she masterfully mixes pattern in her chairs winds through her charming home and in her personal fashion style. You can see her upbeat personality in everything around her.

I LOVE watching Wendy on Instagram. She has built such a beautiful, authentic business that celebrates everything that she loves. She is truly an inspiration.





Little changes happened over time throughout my home, but the next really bold move came when I decided to wallpaper my stair risers. I found the fun Matisse-like wallpaper on Etsy and did the project in a couple of hours. I began noticing how happy I was going up and down my stairs. So, the fire was lit.

It's a well-known fact that I'm a hoarder of cute dishes, to my family's dismay. I cannot resist them and buy them online and at local antique malls. Eating off fun plates and drinking coffee from colorful cups makes me so happy. But problems began when I ran out of space to store them. After my stylist mentioned I should hang them on my empty dining room wall, I finally had a space to showcase the fun designs for everyone to see and a clever way to store them at the same time!

My dining room is ever-evolving ... why shouldn't it be? I do chairs for a living! So, when I get tired of something, I just redo it. The latest dining room makeover involved mixing patterns, painting a dresser in a stripe, and adding a colorful wallpaper. Friends find it funny that my husband and I eat in there every evening. But I swore if I ever had a dining room, I would use it regularly ... and I do.





My bedroom had never been inspiring. We had hand-me-down furniture for most of my married life. I painted dressers and tried to look for unique pieces to complement what I had, but it never really worked very well until I found a colorful pink rug from Annie Selke. That set the tone for the entire room, and I painted my metal bed blue, added a whimsical settee at the base of the bed, and used a variety of pillows for added color. Lucky for me I have a fireplace in my bedroom, which is a great spot for displaying my favorite artists like Carrie Schmitt as well as cheap Wayfair finds.





When my girls were young and at home, I let them do whatever they wanted in their rooms. It was their room, and I wanted them to be happy. But now that they are gone, the rooms are finally mine to decorate for guests. I gave myself permission to let my imagination go wild in these guest rooms, and the friends who come to stay here have loved it.

Green and white Otomi print wallpaper — as well as a cute desk chair — adds fun pizzazz to the space of one of the rooms. This room belonged to my engineer/artist daughter, who painted various Frida Kahlos to display around the home. (They are in the stairwell, too.) We framed one of the Fridas to hang over her antique bed.



Ln my designs, I like to buck the system at times. (For example, who says red and pink don't go together?) It sometimes starts with me wanting to prove something. So, the other guest room was born from this need to prove red and pink could go together. I used a fun lobster wallpaper from Katie Kime on one wall, and a variety of patterns and prints. I took an antique makeup chair that had been in my family since I was a little girl and embellished the flowers on it with paint. It's a happy space now and is lovingly called the Lobster Room.



What I've noticed is that small spaces can have a huge impact with a little imagination. The upstairs hallway is one of those spaces. This area is located just outside the bedrooms and was a chance to play around with a colorful butterfly wallpaper. What was once just a pale yellow painted area has now become a cheerful space where I like to hang out.

The main bathroom got a much-needed makeover last year with new tile. And like every project around my home, one thing always leads to another. My thought process goes something like this: *Since the shower tile was blue, why not paint my bathtub blue, too?* And then add wallpaper to tie in the pink shades with the blue tile? I found a great carved wooden mirror for \$20 and embellished it with colors taken from the wallpaper. I love a good deal that turns into something amazing!

The living room is the real heart of the home. It's open to the kitchen and the wide space is perfect for hosting parties. Art from Carrie Schmitt and my daughter sit layered on my living room mantle. I've painted my coffee table so it would pop against the fuchsia rug. On the other wall, I've recently added a graphic wallpaper with a custom Frida painting by my friend and artist Brittany Atkinson. An old settee, adorned with a luxurious Liberty of London velvet, anchors the wall and provides extra seating.

For me, ideas build on one another over time. Design is a process and I treat it like an adventure ... which makes it fun! I've had to think about my spaces. I contemplate ideas for a long time, but then I execute boldly once I do make a decision. If I make a mistake, I just undo it, pivot and change direction. I've learned to not take myself or my designs too seriously.

My home is my palette where I experiment with color and patterns. It is the truest extension of my work and who I am. And the work will never be done as my taste evolves and I continue to play. Just like the neighbors on Mr. Plumbean's street, I get inspired by each makeover I do and it makes me want to do more. I hope my adventure will inspire you to do the same.

***i* More on Wendy**
www.chairwhimsy.com
Instagram: chairwhimsy
Facebook: chairwhimsy
Pinterest: chairwhimsy





Abby Grace is a brand photographer for high-performing, creative small business owners, and an educator for photographers. Her work has been seen in Forbes, Martha Stewart, Southern Living, and many more publications. She's an expert in brand identity, with a passion for helping others to run businesses that enable them to live lives they dearly love, and believes in the ruthless pursuit of leaning into your unique gifts. An avid Francophile and a Hufflepuff, she often speaks in song lyrics and movie quotes.

i **More on Abby Grace**
www.abbygracephotography.com,
www.abbygraceblog.com
Instagram: abbygracephoto

