Episode 171: The Hidden Cost of Pinterest Design Inspiration

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Hello, and welcome to this episode of My Forever Home the podcast. I'm Frances Cosway, your host for this podcast, and today I'm going to be talking to you about the hidden cost of copying images that you're seeing on Pinterest or Instagram or in magazines.

So I really just wanted to cover how we can get inspired by images, but perhaps copying exactly what you may see in some of these images can be a dangerous and sometimes expensive mistake to have. So I really wanted to give you insight into what's behind the images and how you can actually use them to inspire you instead.

We find that looking at images is a really good way for us to understand ourselves in terms of what we're drawn to, what we like, what we certainly don't like. And as a designer, when a client actually shows me images, I can actually see the threads and I can see the commonality between certain images.

And we certainly use it as part of our briefing process. So having images is an absolutely awesome place to start collating and working out what you like and what you're drawn to. And it is also a really good way to certainly articulate the things that you're drawn to and that you actually like. And it actually doesn't require a definition using words.

So sometimes people can get stuck in that definition of, "Oh, I like Hampton style," or, "I like French Provincial," or something like that. But that is actually open to interpretation anyway because someone's idea of what Hampton style may be could be completely different to what your idea of Hampton style is.

And that's where images can actually play a really important role. But the thing with images is that they can actually be a little bit dangerous in terms of if you say to your designer or you say to your

builder, even more dangerous, "I just want you to copy what you see here. This is exactly what I'm after."

And having my own house photographed and also having many projects of mine photographed as well in a professional way by professional photographers, there is a lot of smoke and mirrors that goes on in photos. And the reason for that is what you're seeing in real life is actually quite different to what you're seeing through a camera lens.

And that means that things need to move around. It'll mean that the way it looks in a lens means that we have to move furniture, we have to move things so that it looks right in the lens, but actually in real life it can look completely different. And so that's one of the reasons why it can be a little bit dangerous to say that's exactly what I'm after."

Particularly when you're looking at furniture. So what I'm gonna delve into is a little bit more of the detail around this. Not just the smokes and mirrors part, but how, what photos are not actually showing you that you really need to consider when you're doing your design. But firstly, what are photos and images?

Doesn't matter where you're getting them from. Pinterest and Instagram are really good places to start. But if you're old school, flicking through magazines, particularly when you're on holiday, is also a really awesome place to get inspiration. You can doggy them, whatever. You can create libraries also in Pinterest as well.

But they are a really good inspiration point, but please don't use them as a blueprint. As I was saying earlier, hand them over and go, "That's exactly what I'm after." Every home, every family is different, and you really, like I always say, you need to design around the functionality first rather than what something looks like.

And even if you're looking at something going, yes, that's ... If I've just got a kitchen in my mind, that's exactly what I want my kitchen to be. I need, I want the sink there, I need the island there. The size of that island looks about right. Yeah, I like where they've got their dishwasher. That may all be fine, but actually there are im- there's p- probably parts of that kitchen that are not in the image depending on how it's been shot.

So it may be functional for that particular kitchen because of maybe what's not shown. So you need to think about your own functionality first, because the other thing is it l- could look beautiful, but it may b- not be functional. And scale is very difficult to determine in photos. So it's hard to tell in images...

it's hard to tell what's missing, and it's also hard to see scale in terms of what is the real distance? Depending on the sort of lens that the photographer's using, it could be really hard to see what are the real proportions of that particular image that you may be drawn to. And of course, with AI, it's even more misconstrued in terms of what the scale is.

And with AI, the scale can be even more out. The other thing to be wary of is color is not necessarily true in photos. So it may look like there's, it's a navy kitchen, or it may be that there's a particular green in that image. But when you go and source that green, it may actually be quite different.

So the true color and the true contrast between maybe the color of the cabinetry and the color of the splashback may be quite different in real life than what they are in the images. And the other thing, the final thing just to consider when you're looking at images is what sort of lighting. Is it being...

Are there, artificial? Is it, has it got artificial lighting that you can't actually see in the image, of course, or is it purely using natural light? Has it been shot at dusk? The way light in your home is coming into the home is going to be completely different than what may be in the images that you see.

So we as designers are combining multiple ideas and multiple thought processes into coming up with a design, rather than just looking at one image. And it's that conversation, it's those briefings, it's the working out the functionality and what's really important that is going to shape the design for your home, for each room.

And the, and, like I was saying before, using all these images to hand over to your designer is incredibly helpful. I always say that a picture tells a thousand words. So as part of the briefing process, it is really a great idea to have those images and arm yourself with those images because they can be, they can start the talking point and referencing what do you like, what you don't like, and so forth.

So what don't photos show? And I've already touched on some of those things. True color, lighting, scale are some really important ones. Functional layouts, because we can't see the whole image. We don't know whether the entire space is being photographed or it's just part of a space. And often with professional photos it is actually only part of a space that's being shown, and it's highlighting particular areas.

It's not gonna clearly show what the storage and the joinery is like. So you may be able to see the face of the joinery, part of the joinery, but you're not actually seeing how that storage really works behind the scenes. So when you open that storage, what's behind it? So that's one thing. Lighting and electrical planning is not often shown in the images, particularly lighting that may not be visible.

There may be other electrical points that are not actually visible in the images either. And you obviously can't see what the budget is. So it's beautiful to fall in love with an image, but we actually don't necessarily know what the budget has been for that particular project, for that room, that space, and any custom details that you're seeing as well.

But coming back to the scale, the room proportions and the ceiling heights are not necessarily clear. Sometimes, I would be able to look at an image and say, "Look, I think roughly the ceiling height is

X." Not always, depending on, again, how much of that image is i- how much of that space is shown in the image.

But that actually affects the space as well. The orientation of natural light. You may not be able to see all the windows and how that's affecting the natural light. And then of course, there's that really important point about you may fall in love with something, but what about the durability of those materials?

What about the maintenance of those materials? That's not available to be seen in those images. That's something that you would need to know about. Any of the behind-the-scenes planning with the designer on what was the design solution for the particular space, that is unknown unless it's described.

And in some magazines or in some Instagram posts, they will actually talk about what the design challenge was and what the response was to that design challenge. So that's really helpful. But it's not always clear. It's not always denoted. The other thing that is really important is what is the connection of that space to other rooms or other spaces?

That's very difficult to understand from just photography of one room. And even if you're thinking about, 10, 10-page spread in House & Garden of a home, because they have their home specials in each magazine you're only seeing the, the rooms that they're photographing. You're still not seeing the entire home.

And you don't actually ... You can't see. They might have a little floor plan, but when you're falling in love with an image, you still really can't see how that image relates to the rest of the home. So that connection to other spaces is really important for flow and how tho- those spaces connect with each other.

So that's unknown as well. And then of course, proportions, which is similar to scale. So if you're falling in love with images and you think, "Oh I still really want that. I want that in my home," what are some of the hidden costs of copying an image that you're seeing? So sometimes it is that the floor plans don't fit.

Now, I have actually seen online Offers of a kitchen plan that you can purchase, and that might seem really appealing. As a designer, I cannot understand how you can buy a kitchen design online and how that fits into your space. There has to be some sort of customization in terms of measurements, in terms of connection to spaces, in terms of flow.

I can't understand how you can pay for an off-the-shelf kitchen design and make it work in your space. That absolutely baffles me how that's possible. And so it's the same with looking at an image and saying to your builder, "Can you just copy this?" Because it needs to have some sort of customization to fit into your space.

So that floor plan that you may see is not necessarily going to fit in your floor plan So then you'll have design changes. It's inevitable, and they could become quite costly depending on when they're coming in. But there will be, some sort of cost to create that cust- that element of customization.

Or if it's happening when you're on site and the builder's actually doing it at the time, and then, "Oh, hang on, we've got another 500 mil here. What do you wanna do here? Do we make a bigger cabinet? Do you want drawers?" Or it's not actually going to fit then with the rest, and that's where that it, the proportions may be wrong.

All sorts of things can happen. But that's going to be a variation that's going to then cost a lot more. So without having that design up front, you're going to end up with some sort of costly design change at some stage along the way, depending on just exactly when that happens. There might be that there's products that don't work together, or the colors of products are not exactly as you thought they would be, or the scale is wrong.

Or you were looking at a symmetric image, and you loved it because it w- there was a whole lot of s- symmetry with that image. And, you might be a symmetrical person or an asymmetrical, and then when you come on site, it's "Oh, that symmetry doesn't actually work in our space." Again, because the measurements are not marrying up to what you've seen in that image.

And then again, how it connects with other spaces. So the floor plan may not be the same. It's not gonna be the same. But the connection to other areas can't mimic what you've seen in the images because you've got a different floor plan. So it gets really tricky. There has to be some sort of way, or there has to be some sort of cost customization with what you have in your home versus what you're seeing.

And then it may be that you're prioritizing the look over the functionality. So that functionality is not working in with how you really thought it may. Or you're focusing so much on the aesthetic that the functionality is thrown out the window, and that means then that you're really not going to get something that works for you, and blowing the budget.

So determined to have the image, what you're seeing in the image that, there's going to be tweaking, as I mentioned before, variations just to get it right. And I suppose that ultimately is going to then end to disappointing final results. You cannot copy exactly what you've seen. Use it for inspiration.

So find out why. What would be the step when you're seeing these images? Finding out the why behind what you're loving. Is it the color? Is it the way the materials are working together? Is it the texture that you love? Is it that overall feeling that it's evoking for you? Because they are the things that you can then create for yourself.

So identify the common themes, and that's what I was saying to you earlier. When a client comes to us with images, we are looking for the common themes. What are we c- what are we seeing across

all the images that are being shown to us by the client? And that's what I'm then seeing as the points that this client is obviously keeps going back to time and time again.

They're the common themes that we're seeing come through, and then that's when I will clarify that with the client around, "What I'm noticing is this. Is that the sort of thing, is that what you're loving? Is that the thing that you're, really wanting to have in your home as well?" And that's where we can really finesse the brief.

It may be the colors, textures, materials that you really love. It may be the stone in the image that you're just like, "That's what I love. That's what I want as my hero piece. I love the color. I love the veining. I love the texture." And so they're the things that you're bringing into your brief that then, th- that create for your home.

Or the feeling. It's, "I love that this feels really calm," or, "I love that this feels really warm. I love that I just want to step into this image and sit there because it just feels like a place that I can really relax." And they're the sorts of things that you can talk to your designer about, and then we can pull out the elements that really connect with you.

It may be that whole space and we're recreating that for your area. And I say recreating because it's not, we're using that as inspiration to recreate because there will be elements that we need to tweak to get it right for you. So it comes back to things that I say time and time again, that use those images for inspiration rather than copying, because ultimately you'll end up paying in the end.

Design for your everyday living. What you're seeing in an image is not necessarily how you're going to be living your life or how you need that space to work for you on a daily basis. So if you're not analyzing that upfront, yes, you could be attracted to the image, but it's purely aesthetic, 'cause you don't really understand how that space works for you.

We need to find out what works for you first, and then design that space using the image as a inspiration point. And as I say time and time again, it's function over form. Get the functionality right by understanding what you need and how you need spaces to work. Make sure that they are adaptable and flexible over a longer period of time, because you're designing for a forever home.

And we get that right first, and then we're designing the other elements in terms of look, feel, feeling. All of that comes into play as part of that process Think about your personality and reflect on that. So what are the elements in those spaces that really talk to you and talk to your personality?

It might be bold colors, it might be calm colors, it may be material types that really that really talk to you and they're a reflection of your personality. Ultimately, again, those images are prompting things in your mind that may actually be talking to you and your personality likes and that's why you're drawn to them in the first place.

You need to think long-term as well. So sometimes we get attracted to images that we are seeing time and time again, or you're attracted to things that you're seeing in the stores because you're

getting used to it. And when you get used to it, you think, "Oh, yeah, I really like that." And that's when I go back to my clients and I ask them, "But how long..."

For example, if there's a particular color that they love, I'll be asking them how long have you loved that color for?" "Oh, the last couple of months." Most likely because you've been seeing it time and time again in images. Or is it a color that you've always loved, it's a color that you always wear or have worn it's a color that you've always been drawn to?

That is a color that you know that you're not going to tire of." So sometimes it gets a bit tricky to understand, is this something that I really love because I've always loved it? Ask yourself that question. Or is it because I've been exposed to it over a period of time that I think that this is something that I've always loved?

And that's a really good question to ask because it's, things that we're seeing all the time, whether it's fashion or in homes, you do get used to it. But then how quickly are you going to not like it? And that's where we've got to think long-term about the decisions that we're making with our materials.

And this is where I do challenge my clients because I wanna make sure that what they're selecting is not just in their mind, "I have," or I like that now." I will challenge that to make sure that what they're choosing is actually something that they really have been drawn to for a longer period of time And investing where it matters.

How are you gonna know that what you're seeing in the image is actually investing where it really matters? Because you don't really know what's been invested. What are some of the choices that have been made in the homes that you're seeing in the images, and what have they maybe compromised on?

Maybe they haven't compromised on anything to get to that particular point. Ultimately, you wanna h- create a home that is uniquely yours. So I certainly think that these images in Instagram, Pinterest, magazines, wherever you're sourcing your images from, AI, are going to be helpful, but they're not going to be the end result.

That is where you're going to need to customize in some way, modify, change, whatever the word is, to get it where you need it to be so that it is your space. Because you're not going to be able to get a cookie cutter, "That's exactly what I want," and relay it back to your home for all the reasons that I've already gone through in this episode already.

So by all means, grab those mags, grab th- grab those images, collate them. Even better, collate them by room, your kitchen, your bathroom, your living. And keep going back to them because you may actually find that you get sick of some of these images. "Oh, no, actually, maybe now I don't really like that anymore."

And then take it away. You might be exposed to more. There is a point in time that you will need to stop collating images because then it becomes a distraction. But if you've collated enough, you'll

definitely be able to see the themes, as I spoke about earlier, of what you are continually going back to, and that's the most important theme p- for you to find for you to ascertain and really firmly decide, "These are the colorways and materials and everything else that I would like in my home."

So I hope that's helped you determine how to use images for inspiration and how to avoid trying or thinking that being able to copy it down to the absolute millimeter is going to work for you, 'cause I can guarantee you it won't, and it'll end up costing you a lot of money. All right that's it from me.

So until next time good luck searching and finding all the images that will be right for your project, and good luck looking for your themes. And as always, if you ever need assistance with that, there's always an initial consult you can book with me or a design hour bundle if you need a little bit more time, and we can work through those things together if you need to.

That's it from me this time. Bye for now.

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