

## A blog's life

By Caroline Taylor

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If you'd asked me a year ago what I thought about internet blogging, my answer would have been pretty negative. Why would daily updates about a stranger's mundane life – a tedious online diary – be of interest to anyone beyond their close friends and family (whom they could easily reach via e-mail, Facebook or MySpace)? When a friend suggested I write a blog about my love for home decoration, I laughed it off as a crazy idea. Why would anyone care what I had to say?



Caroline Taylor started her blog in 2008

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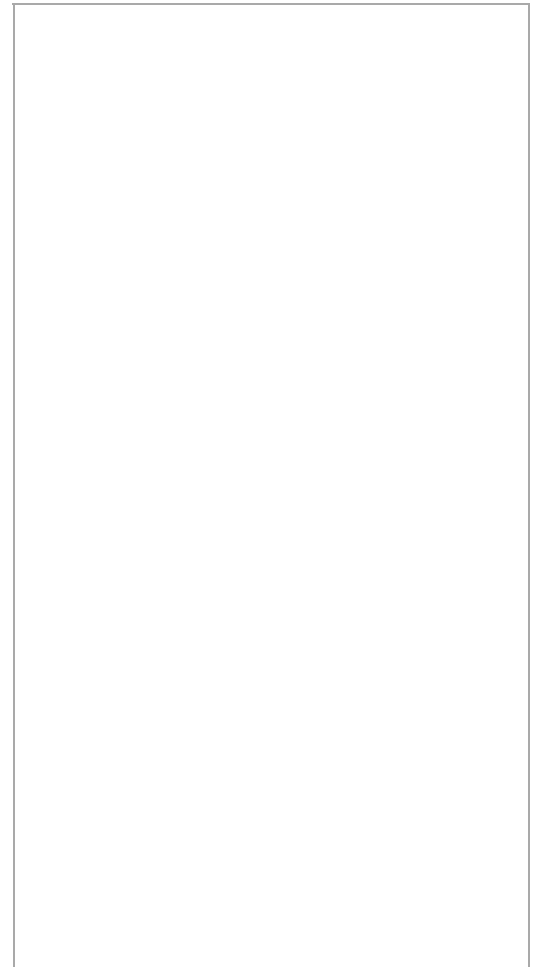
But my curiosity got the better of me and I eventually Googled "interior design blogs". What I found was fascinating. I quickly realised that these dispatches, posted on simple websites, are a means to express yourself while discovering and interacting with like-minded people. Soon, I was gripped by the blogging bug. In October last year, I set up [Patchworkharmony.blogspot.com](#) and enthusiastically keyed in my first entry.

Every blogger finds their niche – mine is vintage-style home accessories, books on the subject and general inspiration – but there is quite possibly a blog for every interest and speciality imaginable. [Blogcatalog.com](#), one of the largest blog directories on the internet, currently has 3,208 listings under its "Home and Garden" section alone.

Their proliferation isn't too surprising, since setting one up is simple and free. Register with one of the blog hosts, such as Blogger, Typepad or WordPress, give your blog a name, choose a template, pick colours and fonts and add photos or illustrations. The host sites lead you through the process step by step, so no technical computer knowledge is needed. Some people progress to hosting their own blogs but this requires purchasing a domain name and some knowledge of HTML coding.

Getting people to read your work is more difficult. But, in addition to the standard round-robin e-mail introducing your blog to friends and colleagues, directories can help. You can submit your blog to get listed, then connect with other bloggers, solicit advice and attract more traffic to your posts.

Certain design blogs have become well-established without much active publicity. Take [Decor8blog.com](#), a three-year-old blog that now has a worldwide audience of nearly 20,000 visitors per day. American writer and interior design consultant Holly Becker started it when



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blogging was a relatively new idea. "It was all word of mouth and timing," she says.

Her blog's popularity probably has something to do with its almost tactile, fabric-like design and consistent content covering topics from the latest wallpaper designs and inspiring colour palettes to quirky online shops. You can tell that Becker has a real passion for writing and decorating and only includes work she believes in. "That's the thing with blogs," she says. "They have to suit you personally or else it's not that exciting." Plus there's no hint of commercial influence in her commentary, which sometimes creeps into other blogs, online magazines, or e-zines, and e-mail newsletters.

While Decor8 is a general blog on interiors, many focus on much more specific areas. [Chairblog.eu](#) is, for example, as the name suggests, all about chairs, while [Thekitchendesigner.org](#) concentrates on just one room and is, not surprisingly, maintained by a US-based kitchen designer, Susan Serra.

Another successful concept is [Decorbycolor.com](#) – a collection of blogs categorised into colour palettes, including one dedicated to all things pink and brown and another labelled "Everything Turquoise". Erin Olsen, 28, came up with the idea as a way to entertain herself and give others ideas when she was living abroad and unable to get a work visa. But she soon realised she could make a living from it and, now back in the US and based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, that's exactly what she does, in spite of having no formal interior design training.



Products from the 'Everything Turquoise' blog at Decorbycolor.com

Her "business model" works because she generates revenue from GoogleAdSense, a programme that sends relevant ads to her site and ensures she's paid each time users click on them and from affiliate programmes, whereby specific retailers, including Macy's department store, [Overstock.com](#) and about 70 others, pay a commission when her recommendations of their products result in a sale. "[But] I didn't start my websites to make money," she insists. "I discovered affiliate marketing well after I started my blogs and realised that was basically what I was already doing. I could just get paid for it."

Decorbycolor.com has been viewed nearly 1m times in the last year and Olsen estimates she now gets about 7,000 hits a day.

London-based design commentator Marcus Fairs is also building a business around his blog, [Dezeen.com](#), which he launched in late 2006 following 15 years as a print journalist, including a stint editing Icon magazine. "Back then blogging tended to be seen as a platform that allowed opinionated amateurs to rant; they weren't taken seriously by the mainstream media," he says. "But now a blog is seen as an extremely powerful and flexible publishing tool. The structure is so simple and logical. It's easy for readers to follow ... the way blogs order information according to the date it was published. If you have the energy to uncover and publish a never-ending stream of good-quality content, then a blog is a great way to build an audience. And [they] are extremely easy to set up and update."

Although Dezeen.com looks more professional than many blogs – there is high-quality photography and links for advertisers and press – "it's essentially an out-of-the-box WordPress product with a pretty face", Fairs says. He now employs three people and draws more than 1m readers a month. "Our advertising revenue is growing nicely as brands start to want to be associated with cool blogs," he says.

Retailers have also discovered the power of blogs. San Francisco-based [2modern.blogs.com](#) is, for example, an offshoot of contemporary design store [2modern.com](#), which includes commentary not just from founder Greg Finney but from furniture connoisseurs and architects, as well as guest bloggers who can apply for the chance to post. Launched in 2005, it now attracts more than 10,000 readers a day and, Finney says, helps drive sales. Still, he insists, "we grow the blog because of our passion for modern design, architecture, art, accessories. If the readers buy something then that is great but, in the end, that really is not necessarily the impetus for the blog."

Netherlands-based Danielle de Lange also runs a blog, [Style-files.com](#), in tandem with an online home accessories shop, Le Souk at [Soukshop.com](#). The blog came first – she launched it as a place to post her vast collection of cuttings from interiors magazines and newspapers – but as its popularity grew she decided there was a retail opportunity, too. Today, de Lange estimates that 20-30 per cent of her sales come from people who found her through the blog.

"The readers of Style Files are definitely within the target group for Le Souk products," she says. That said, "it is not necessarily the case the other way round. The customers of Le Souk are not necessarily design aficionados; the readers of the Style Files certainly are." As a result,

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she frequently mentions her store on her blog but does not advertise her blog on the Le Souk website. Like Finney, she also insists that the driving force of Style-files.com is not commercial interest but a desire to share good ideas.

The phenomenon of one-way posts developing into two-way virtual communication and then real-world enterprise is common. In Gloucestershire, west England, a group of bloggers with a common passion for crafts even joined up last November to host a Vintage and Handmade Fair



([www.vintageandhandmade.co.uk](http://www.vintageandhandmade.co.uk)). The event was a chance for them to meet in person, eat cake and see each others' work. Now organisers Jayne Soule, who writes

[Countrycottagechic.blogspot.com](http://Countrycottagechic.blogspot.com), and Michele Chivers, of [Infocowboysandcustard.blogspot.com](http://Infocowboysandcustard.blogspot.com), are planning a second one in May.

The Vintage and Handmade Fair in Gloucestershire, south-west England

"We thought it was a great idea but weren't sure how it would be received," says Soule. "But we needn't have worried as we had a queue of people waiting to come in when the doors opened – and they didn't stop coming all day. We had visitors from as far afield as London, Oxford, Kent, Cornwall and Wales [and] some were there for up to five hours. Lots of people said it had a village-fête feel – personal and friendly with top quality goods for sale."

If you're not part of the blogging world, it may at first appear to be a slightly odd and obsessive activity; some bloggers see it as a daily – or even more frequent – ritual, just like brushing their teeth. But the passion, enthusiasm and dedication I discovered in Soule and the other design bloggers I contacted was both endearing and infectious. I discovered that it's not a lonely pursuit for singletons posting inane thoughts into the ether but a venue for people – from crafts enthusiasts to contemporary design aficionados – to come together. Relationships, both personal and commercial, develop. And real-life communities can be created.

So, you may wonder what has happened with my own blog. Well, I try to post comments three times week. Although my readership is still small, it is slowly growing. And, like de Lange, I recently decided to open my own online boutique – Patchwork Harmony Home Accessories at [Patchworkharmony.co.uk](http://Patchworkharmony.co.uk) – linked to the blog. But in running a retail business (hopefully profitably) I won't forget why I started blogging in the first place: my appreciation for good design and a love of beautiful things.

#### Top blogs

Midcentury modern design: [Twentytwentyone.blogspot.com](http://Twentytwentyone.blogspot.com)

Ecofriendly living: [Inhabitat.com](http://Inhabitat.com)

Parisian style: [Parisapartment.wordpress.com](http://Parisapartment.wordpress.com)

Architecture and design: [Dezeen.com](http://Dezeen.com)

DIY ideas: [Designspongeonline.com](http://Designspongeonline.com)

Contemporary inspiration: [Contemporist.com](http://Contemporist.com)

Retro and minimalist musings: [Inspirationbubble.blogspot.com](http://Inspirationbubble.blogspot.com)

Eclectic interiors: [Urbanlifestyledecor.com](http://Urbanlifestyledecor.com)

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