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# January 2015

### Special

## Be Bold!

**80** What would you do if you weren't afraid of anything? Move across the country? Become a lounge singer? Try online dating? Well, get ready to seize the day, armed with our guide to discovering your own true grit. You'll find wisdom on the real meaning of courage, voices of reason to quiet your nagging fears, inspiration from some gutsy women, and even a few secret weapons to take on your journey. We know you're braver than you ever imagined—so *bon courage*.



### Features

#### **92 COMING HOME**

Eight years after filing for bankruptcy, Iyanla Vanzant finally had her career back on track and a house of her own again—but it wasn't a home. So Oprah sent her a little housewarming gift: designer Nate Berkus. *By Lisa Kogan*

#### **98 NAKED AND UNAFRAID**

Four women strip off their beauty inhibitions and embrace the looks they've always dreamed of.

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In her lifelong struggle with the Big Questions, *Amy MacLin* had read every self-help book on the shelves. But independent study wasn't giving her the Big Answers—so she enrolled herself in the School of Life.



**92** "COMING HOME"

“This was not just a renovation; it was a transformation.”



**80** "BE BOLD!"

“The scariest thing imaginable is a life in which you don't occasionally feel fear.”





THE VEGAS-STYLE crystal chandelier is out, a 5-by-5-foot candelabra is in.



THE FOYER'S vinyl floor was replaced with Travertine stone tiles. The traditional wood banister was ripped out to make way for a wrought-iron banister, hand-forged by artisan welder Larry Estevez.



"WHEN OPRAH asked me to do Iyanla's place, I wasn't exactly picturing a massive 8,500-square-foot structure in need of a complete overhaul from baseboards to ceiling fixtures," designer Nate Berkus says, still sounding a little stunned.



ITYANLA VANZANT has lived in an awful lot of houses over the years, but it took resilience, perseverance, five butterflies, and a little help from her friends to finally find her home in the world.

# COMING HOME

BY  
Lisa Kogan

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
Björn Wallander





"I LIKE CLEAN LINES and simple, geometric patterns," says Iyanla. No wonder she got a kick out of personally removing the chintz window treatments.

**YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THE STORY:** As a kid, Iyanla Vanzant bounced from one violent household to the next, and the abuse she suffered put her on the fast track to becoming a single mother on welfare in her 20s. But she worked hard and she dreamed big, and slowly she made those dreams come true. While raising three children, Iyanla pulled herself through college, earned a law degree, hosted a radio show, and developed a coaching style that was funny, frank, and insightful. Her voice counseled, consoled, and cut to the chase.

Before long she was a regular on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, a best-selling author, wealthy, famous, and happily remarried—her future blindingly bright. Then it all went away.

The millennium ended with Iyanla leaving the *Oprah* show for greener pastures that turned out to be not nearly as verdant as she'd imagined. And the new century began with her 30-year-old daughter, Gemmia, being diagnosed with a rare form of colon cancer that would take her life 15 months later. Iyanla's TV presence evaporated, her book deals vanished, her marriage collapsed, and, by 2006, she found herself a thousand miles from nowhere—forced to file for bankruptcy.

But eight years after handing over her keys to the bank, she has done exactly what she does best: She's worked through her heartache, inspired others to do the same, and dared to dream another dream. The woman who hits the road week after week on OWN's top-rated reality series, *Iyanla: Fix My Life*, has gotten her own life back on track.

And Oprah was there to celebrate all that it took for Iyanla to at long last find her way home. "Iyanla was so excited to be able to buy a house again, but as she was telling me all about the vinyl floors and trying to figure out what she should do with the cranberry-colored walls, I thought, *It's gonna take this woman until 2022 to get that place together*," she says. With her don't-you-just-love-a-good-surprise? smile, she adds, "And then I had an idea."

Housewarming gifts are usually pretty standard: Some people send an orchid. Some people send Champagne. Oprah sent Nate Berkus.



THE THEATER ROOM is both spacious and cozy, layered with plush textiles and ethnic touches—think antique bowls filled with African beads. Left: Nate has Iyanla's vision book all but memorized.



Housewarming gifts are usually pretty standard: Some people send an orchid. Some send Champagne. Oprah sent Nate Berkus.



NOTICING the white sofa in Iyanla's vision book, Nate picked out a similar piece and balanced it with pillows covered in vintage fabrics from around the world: "I wanted to help the person who I've seen help so many others over the years."



BECAUSE Iyanla is a fan of pinks and purples, Nate gilded her bathroom with a blush-colored, blown-glass chandelier and a pale amethyst pouf.







A DOVE GRAY grounded Iyanla's library, and Nate added the butterscotch mohair sofa for a warm pop of color. Right: Wood for the cabinetry in Iyanla's "soap lab" comes from an old barn two miles up the road. "What more soul do you need?" Nate says.



THE NICKEL-PLATED, solid copper tub in Iyanla's ritual bathing room provides the ultimate retreat. Below: "My kitchen is the most important room in the house," Iyanla says. Nate used classic elements, including ivory-colored cabinets, marble counters, a walnut-topped island, and, most crucial of all, a small monitor for Iyanla to watch Law & Order reruns as she cooks. "Food never tastes right without my Law & Order on!"



**"Nate saw what was possible, and he refused to settle for less," Iyanla says. "This was not a renovation; it was a transformation."**



Nate is quiet for a minute, taking in the light and the words. And then, as if to signal that life goes on, a family of deer wanders past the window.

Nate breathes deep and squeezes Iyanla's hand—it's time to get to work. They settle in the dated kitchen, and he opens the vision book she sent him in anticipation of their meeting. Filled with images and moods, concepts and colors, it maps the road to her perfect sanctuary. He lays out paint chips and fabric swatches, finishes and fantasies, listening closely, layering textures, collaging patterns, mixing and matching, and monitoring Iyanla's reactions until he becomes a man with a very definite plan.

On the first day of construction, Nate grabs a hammer and hits the corner of the round arch he intends to square off; Iyanla looks as though she might pass out. "She's very sensitive to the spirit of the home, almost like it's a living thing, and I think she finds the idea of demolition a little..." Nate struggles for the right word, "well, disrespectful." He reassures Iyanla that he'll pay very close attention to her wish list and show Villa Nova nothing but tender, loving care. He promises she'll be seeing mood boards and having the backsplash and marble conversations, "but from a distance!" He lets her say her goodbyes to every surface and whisper sweet nothings into the walls. Then he walks her to the door and tells her she is not allowed back until it's time to see the finished product.

It will take several bazillion texts, phone calls, curveballs, and mini-crises over the better part of four months for the project to be finished. It will also require the elbow grease and creativity of nearly 150 people. "We all feel like we're part of a gift," says contractor/superhero Terry Barnes of Barnes Builders. "We want to get the job done beautifully for Iyanla and Oprah and Nate. Everybody's heart is on the same page here."

And it shows. On the morning of the big reveal, the driveway to Iyanla's front door is lined with nearly everyone who has poured their energy into Villa Nova—from housecleaners to cabinetmakers, plumbers to painters, drywallers, design team, the crew who hand-forged the banister, and the woman who managed the budget. Somebody else is there, too. "Gemmia, she was a butterfly fanatic," Iyanla says softly. "And when I pulled up to Villa Nova—that day, there were five butterflies flying around the front gate. Nobody else knew what that meant, but I knew."

She also knows that Nate has understood her on a deeper level than she ever could have hoped. "The minute I walked through the front door, I knew that he saw the soul of my house. He understood what was possible, and he refused to settle for anything less. This was not just a renovation; it was a transformation," she sighs, a little bit lost in the memory. "I knew I'd finally come home."

**"OPRAH AND I BOTH BELIEVE a house should rise up to greet you," Nate says. "I hope Villa Nova is a place where Iyanla can pray and cook and relax and just be with the people she loves. I hope this home rises up to greet her every single morning before she even opens her eyes."**

