

Personal Architecture: Understanding, Improving, and Living in Your Inner House by Peter Brooks

About six years ago, my sister had a disturbing, recurring dream. In the dream, she entered a dilapidated two story house; inside, most of the rooms were empty and disheveled. Near the end of the dream she heard her daughter cry. My sister searched frantically eventually finding my niece in the only clean room of the house.

When my sister awoke she was alarmed by the images of her and her daughter living in a broken house. Since my sister and I regularly shared dreams as a source of generating writing ideas, I had purchased a dream interpretation book for some guidance.

According to the book, a house can often represent the dreamer's self image. At the time, my sister was overweight. She surmised that the dilapidated house was a manifestation of her disdain over her body weight. The house's poor internal condition, she thought, was a representation of how her life felt like a mess after the divorce she had recently experienced.

The author suggests re-visualizing a bad dream, using our imagination to change the events, in order to empower ourselves subconsciously. My sister tried this technique. Before she went to sleep, she imagined herself cleaning up the different rooms of the house, fixing anything which was broken. A couple weeks later, the nightmare stopped recurring, and the rest of her life started to improve in small ways.

In our profession we deal with two types of housing: the buildings we work in and the dwellings we live in. We try initiatives to improve both physical spaces. We may not realize it, but our unique perspectives can be found in how we improve both. This subconscious process can be derived from how we view our internal house. Yet, we don't spend as much time working on our internal house since we feel it's easier to change the physical world, than dive into the deep pool of our psyche.

Learning to work on our internal house, and visualizing those improvements, can give us a better understanding to the methods we use to improve our other houses. Use your imagination to reflect upon the following areas (it may help to write down some of your thoughts in a journal for later reference).

Describe Your Internal House

Like my sister's dream, what do you think your internal house looks like? Think about it before you fall asleep. If the image never appears, take some time to walk around your home/apartment and consider what similar themes may exist.

For the outside, how do you maintain and keep it looking? Do you have a garden, trees? What about the painting of the house? What about the inside? What rooms did you give the most attention to? Are there unique attributes to any of the rooms (like the one clean room in my sister's 'house' where her daughter cried)?

Initial Improvements

In any type of self improvement, we all yearn for a Ty Pennington to come in and make the changes for us. But the reality is, only you can improve and work on your internal house. The initial start takes some courage because the process can be long, and there may be things you haven't faced in a while. My sister started with the basement of her inner house because she felt that a strong foundation would support other improvements.

The Basement, The Attic, The Junk Drawer

We all have a room we fear, a room we leave our baggage, and a drawer we leave our random junk. The basement of our internal house is dark and mysterious. We fear exploring that room for what we will find out about ourselves. But the basement is a great place to start because often it's those things we fear which hamper us from achieving greater success.

Likewise, but less morose, we have an attic where we hold onto some things we don't need any more. Memories, grudges, bad luck, worries, fears, even some stale dreams take up that space which could be used for other more purposeful goals. Learn to get rid of those things (a sort of mental rummage sale) or, in the case of stale dreams, dust them off for a new perspective.

Finally, there's the junk drawer; a small space which holds multiple smaller items we refuse to toss but may not have room for elsewhere. We all have this drawer, and really, we may have one for the rest of our life. When the drawer accumulates too much it starts to become a burden, or causes difficulty when finding a specific item.

Cleaning vs. Organizing vs. Updating

As you look to improve areas of your internal house, remember that different activities will fix different problems. Cleaning a room helps you remove the dirt to see the problem clearly. Metaphorically this compares to facing actions which may have caused great distress in yourself and others.

Sometimes, the goal is to sort through the day to day items which build up. Organizing allows you to spread all those items out, see them individually instead of as an ever growing pile, and deal with them one by one. This may lead to further cleaning or exploring, but it's also a good start if you don't have one.

Updating an area of your internal house takes the most time and the most risk. The room itself may be adequate, but to avoid the dust of inaction we need to try new initiatives and healthy risks.

Regular Upkeep

In addition to being patient with your internal house improvements, remember that you may need to do regular maintenance. A fresh coat of paint, waxing the floor, dusting the living room, vacuuming the bedroom, all of these activities, albeit small and somewhat nagging, help keep your internal house in a condition you comfortable living in.

My sister was initially skeptical about this metaphorical mumbo jumbo. Then she realized something key when reflecting on the one clean room where her daughter cried. Despite everything else in her house falling apart, she made sure that part of her house was always clean and safe for her daughter. She considered that room her heart, which gave her hope and inspiration to improve everything else.