

Marin IJ AT HOME: Perfection has no place in a happy home

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Lisa Quinn is the author of 'Life's Too Short to Fold Fitted Sheets' and an Emmy-award winning TV host of 'Home With Lisa Quinn.'

When I first heard the title of Lisa Quinn's new book, "Life's Too Short to Fold Fitted Sheets" (Chronicle Books), I knew she and I were cut from the same non Martha-Stewart cookie dough. Usually when I read home design books, they leave me screaming, "How can anyone live like this!" Not this time. Reading Quinn's book, I felt like one of those fake dogs that people stick in their rear car windows, the ones that bob their toy heads nonstop: Yes, yes, yes.

She hooked me with the title. Every time I fold fitted sheets, I feel as if I'm arm wrestling an octopus. Quinn says to heck with trying: "The real definition of insanity is folding a fitted sheet...and

expecting it to result in anything other than...a huge turban. Just wad it up the best you can and shove it in the closet. Most of the wrinkles stretch out when you put the sheet on the bed anyway."

My love fest with Quinn, an Emmy-award winning TV host, actually began last February, when I appeared as a two-time guest on her TV show, "Home With Lisa Quinn," where I shared tips for taming havoc at home.

As we chatted, I realized we were kindred spirits. We're both working moms and recovering Marthaholics. We both want beautiful homes, but we also value our sanity and would rather keep that than house.

I knew that when her book came out, I would have to get my hands on it. I called Quinn last week to congratulate her. "Writing it felt like coming out of the closet," she said. "Here I was, this home and garden TV expert interviewing dozens of guests, who would talk about topics like creating perfect place settings with precisely folded napkins, and I couldn't relate to any of it. I felt like a huge fraud."

A fast read - I finished it on a plane flight despite the snoring person next to me - Quinn's book, billed as "Your Ultimate Guide to Domestic Liberation," offers hundreds of fast household fixes and shortcuts, including 17 meals to make with a pre-cooked deli chicken, and the top 10 things to do if company is coming in 30 minutes. (No. 10: Just before guests come, spray a fine mist of nontoxic spray cleaner in the air right by the front door. You didn't really clean anything, but it smells like you did.)

While she's not giving out permission slips to let people become slobs, Quinn is asking women to take it down a notch. "Shooting for perfection stresses you out, drives everyone around you nuts and makes you miss all the fun." Here are some highlights:

Quinn philosophies:

- The less stuff you have, the less you have to clean.
- Thirteen throw pillows on your bed are at least eight too many.

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- Darker room looks cleaner. Get dimmers on all overhead lights and table lamps immediately.

Quinn diagnostics: You're out of control if...

- You have more than three "junk drawers."
- Things fall out of your car when you open the door.
- You have papers from high school.
- You have lids but not their containers, or vice versa.

You overaccessorize if...

- You have more than four decorative pillows on your sofa.
- You have more than seven items on your mantel.
- You can't set a drink on your nightstand.
- You have a lot of items no one is allowed to use: fancy bath soaps, guest hand towels, specialty candles.

Quinn's must-haves for slacker house keeping (And I thought I had this down.):

- Rain-X. You get this product at auto part stores. It helps rainwater slide off windshields for better visibility, and can help water run right off shower doors. Wipe it on the inside of glass shower doors once a month, and never squeegee again.
- White candles. Rub these on grout to deter stains, and prevent mold and mildew.
- Alka-Seltzer. Drop tablets in the toilet bowl, or in a dirty vase with water. They will clean both fast.
- Mr. Clean Magic Eraser. As magic as it sounds, this product takes almost any stray mark off any surface, particularly good for Crayon on walls.
- Crayons. The brown ones are your friends. To hide scratches in wood surfaces, including wood floors, choose a shade closest to the wood. Color in scratches, melt wax with a hair dryer and buff with a soft cloth.
- Facial tissues with lotion. These make awesome, cheap dust cloths.

Basically, if you believe hard labor should be confined to childbirth, then unite with other over-extended women, throw in your dishtowel and gobble up this book - preferably with a lemon drop martini.

Syndicated columnist Marni Jameson is the author of the just released "House of Havoc," and "The House Always Wins" (Da Capo Press). Contact her through www.marnijameson.com.