

The Spaces We Zoom From

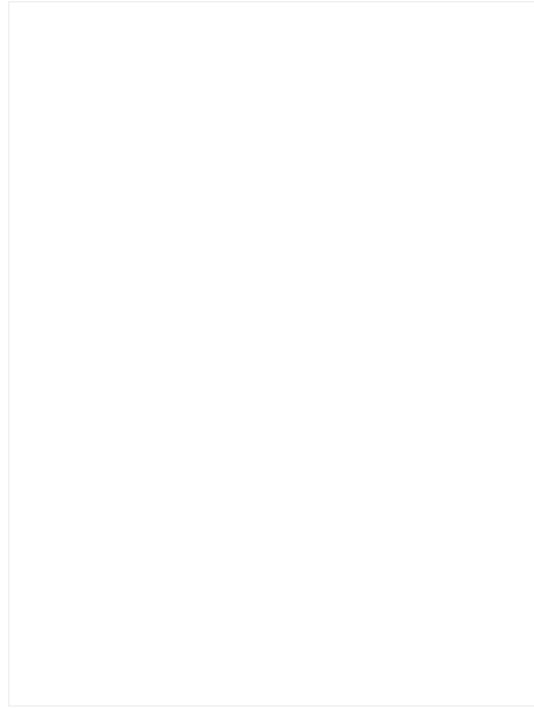
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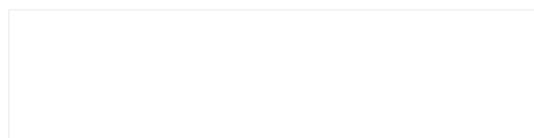
What's behind you? For many in during the COVID-19 pandemic, interior walls have taken on a new meaning. In a world where most rooms are virtual, the physical spaces pictured in front of the webcam are the closest many will come to indoor intimacy for a long time. More people are curating their surroundings, framed within a Zoom window. For students and others working from home, the desire to

appear composed and professional may shape choices about where to sit, what art to install, what slice of inner life should be visible to others in classes and meetings. Yet, what lies beyond the edges of the composed picture tells a deeper story of the day-to-day; unmade beds, wrappers, strewn laundry, post-it note reminders to eat or drink enough water. Often, for necessity's sake, Zoom backgrounds look different from the rest of the space, contrasting outward appearance with messier places that often reflect the stresses of living in a pandemic. New Voices spoke to four Jewish writers about the spaces they Zoom from.



Miriam Saperstein

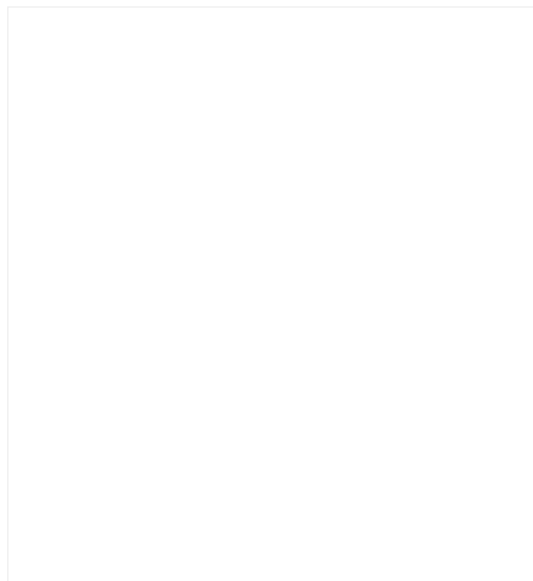
When I zoom into class from my co-op bedroom, my classmates can't see the unmade bed behind me, sheets and pillows scrambled like an egg. They can see the art (mostly my own work) painstakingly arranged on the yellow wall, wearing ill-fitting frames that I bought this summer when I decided to be a person who frames their art. The pieces include a watery sleep amulet, a honeyed prayer for the Shabbos queen, one of the consequences of disentanglement, a reclamation of myself as queer beloved, and a humbling gift from a cousin. This is my holiest space, my bed surrounded by its angels, but also a background my classmates likely associate with me more than my height.





Dionna Dash

This is the desk where I sit for my Zoom classes and meetings. The background everyone else sees on my camera is pretty pristine, but my own view during Zoom calls is kind of a mess. The one thing that keeps me grounded is my small army of sticky notes, listing due dates and ideas for upcoming assignments, or any questions I have to remember to ask in my Zooms that day. There's one sticky note that stands out on the left side because it's white and it's a little larger than the rest. It reads: "Things More Important Than Stress and Perfect Grades: health/nutrition, fitness/exercise, sleep, making memories, relationships/friends, mental health, happiness!" — a reminder that through all the essays, exams, and other stressors whose details may join the army on small sheets of yellow paper, the most important things are those that can't be written down.

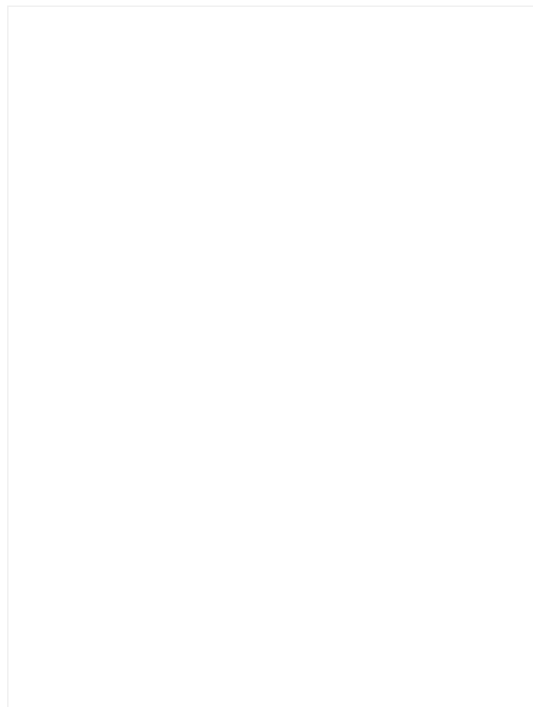


Sasha Hochman

I'm living and working in my grandmother's apartment. The purple couch was her idea. The bookshelf was mine. The black side

table was her selection (30 years ago), The Humans of New York coffee table books were mine. The Andy Warhol flowers were chosen by both of us. Sometimes I think it might be too loud in the background of Zoom calls. But over these past couple of months, I've grown used to adding a pop of color to the white and beige collage of screens.

Since leaving college in the middle of last semester, I moved living-spaces five different times. Each time, I would make unfamiliar rooms feel recognizable by bringing books that have meant a lot to me—stories of resistance, revolution, romance. But I could only bring two or three. When I moved into this apartment at the beginning of the semester, it was luxurious to carry in boxes of books — The comfort of words that tell us who we are.



Rebecca Tauber

In order to avoid displaying my typically messy, unmade bed in the background of my calls, I Zoom from by bed. On the wall behind me hangs a collection of prints I have gathered in recent years: leaf prints cut out from an old calendar, flower landscapes bought as a set, and my newest [Esty purchase \(https://www.etsy.com/shop/JessicaTamarDeutsch?ref=simple-shop-header-name&listing_id=850826756\)](https://www.etsy.com/shop/JessicaTamarDeutsch?ref=simple-shop-header-name&listing_id=850826756) of Jewish prints including pickles, a shabbat breakfast, and the modeh ani. And if I accidentally jostle my laptop, those I'm Zooming with get a glimpse of the amulet hanging on my ceiling, made for me by friends taking a kabbalah class after I dreamt of a dybbuk. And, for a little while longer, there's the bright orange tree peeking through the window.

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