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EXCLUSIVE

**“THE
YEAR THAT
CHANGED
MY LIFE”**

**By
Beyoncé**

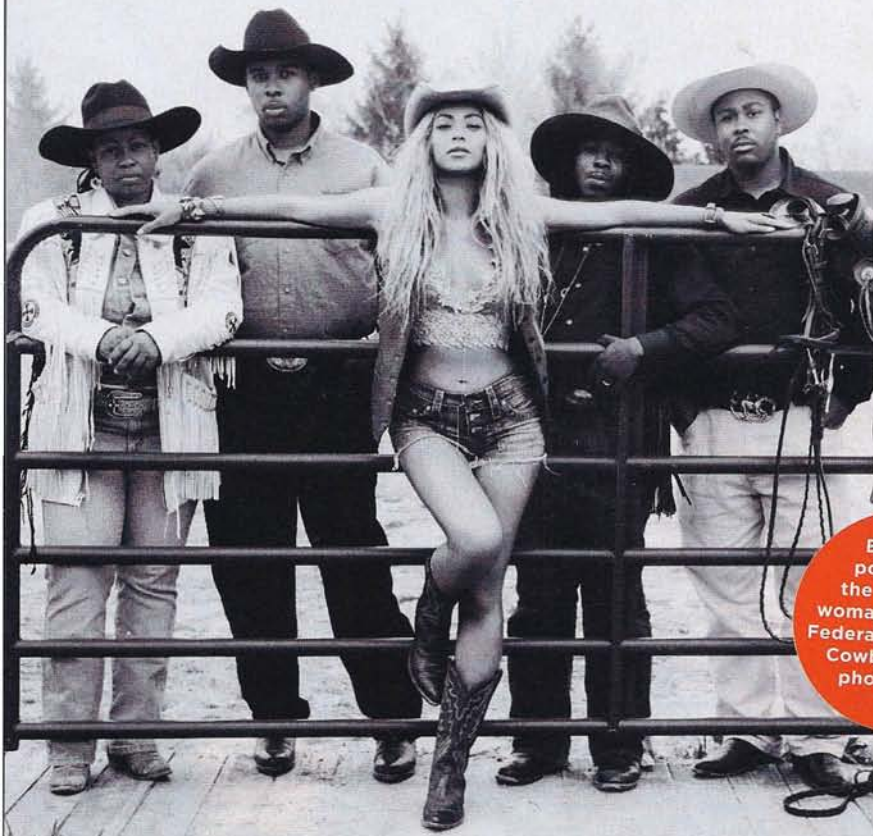
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Behind the Scenes Exclusive

Beyoncé arrived at Gold Coast Farm in Old Brookville, New York, ready for a day at the rodeo. That morning the lone star of our cover shoot was all smiles and ready for the unexpected—even coying up, cautiously at first, to Uther, an Andalusian horse. Of course, our golden girl, who loved the rodeo as a kid, conquered her fears, and the result was never-seen-anything-like-it-before shots of Beyoncé at her laid-back, stress-free best. “She was the sexiest cowgirl of the summer,” says ESSENCE Editor-at-Large Mikki Taylor. “From kicking back in the tin tub to lassoing a horse, Beyoncé did it all in style. And to that, we tip our hat—a ten-gallon one at that.”

Beyoncé poses with the men (and woman!) from the Federation of Black Cowboys at our photo shoot.

Penny Wrenn

Background: She’s a Harlem-based writer whose work has appeared in *Esquire*; *O, The Oprah Magazine*; and *Glamour*.

Assignment: From movies to TV to music, Wrenn becomes your go-to girl for what’s in this season in “Your Best Summer Ever!” (page 63). “I’m looking forward to all things Ester Dean,” says Wrenn. “Our interview was like talking to a cousin.”

What’s next: She’ll be attending her first Sade concert this summer.



Cheryl Slocum

Background: She’s a contributor at *Country Living* who has worked at top restaurant kitchens in New York City, Los Angeles and Paris.

Assignment: She offers healthier ways to fill your plate at your next family reunion in “The Event of the Summer!” (page 148).

What’s next: On cherylslocum.com she’ll be blogging about food heroes, including those who fight for safe agricultural practices.

Robin Wilson

Background: She’s an eco-friendly lifestyle expert who’s added her finishing green touch to President Clinton’s Harlem office and the private residence of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

Assignment: For “Home Sweet Home” (page 97), Wilson shares her eco-conscious tips for adding value to your house.

What’s next: She’s launching a textile collection of towels, bedding and pillows to be sold at retailers this fall.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RUVEN AFANADOR; COURTESY OF SUBJECT; LISA SLOCUM; WENDY HOPE

DESIGNING SPACES | REFINANCING | RELAXING AT WORK

Work & Wealth

Home Sweet Home

ECO-FRIENDLY INTERIOR DESIGNER ROBIN WILSON SHOWS YOU 5 CREATIVE WAYS TO ADD VALUE TO YOUR HOME

BY TANISHA A. SYKES | PHOTOGRAPHY BY HECTOR MANUEL SANCHEZ

PROP STYLIST, KARIN OLSEN/MARNIE ROSE AGENCY; WILSON, LARRY BAGLIO



As I stroll down the staircase embellished by wrought iron railings and a wool geometric-patterned carpet, my eyes focus on a media room replete with hydrangeas and perfectly pink roses. Books about Black heritage adorn a wide mahogany bookcase, while John Coltrane blows from surround sound speakers. I am in the basement of home owners Joy and John McKinley*, empty nesters who created a lower-level living space with the help of designer and lifestyle expert Robin Wilson. We asked Wilson, CEO of Robin Wilson Home in New York City, to help you spruce up your house, condo or apartment. Here she highlights five budget-friendly projects that will add high style. ▶

1 PAINT

Add a pop of color to any room with Benjamin Moore low volatile organic compound (VOC) or no-VOC paints, which are self-priming and quick-drying, and emit less odor.

Retrofit your space with warm, inviting accents.



ADD A MEDIA ROOM

Increase your home's square footage by transforming a drab living room into an entertainment haven. People want an open floor plan that is bright, welcoming and designed to bring family and friends together. "The easiest thing to do is to set the chairs on a swivel, place the TV at eye level, and select an ottoman to serve as both a coffee table and additional seating," says Wilson. Shop for quality furnishings at Room & Board (roomandboard.com) and Restoration Hardware (restorationhardware.com). To complete the hookup, buy Samsung's Central Station (\$450-\$600, samsung.com), a wireless docking device that connects your laptop, TV, MP3 player and camera. No more searching for the remote!

3 REVIVE THE KITCHEN

Your 1970's kitchen with Formica countertops, a linoleum floor and outdated appliances is overdue for an upgrade. "If you have \$10,000, invest in quality cabinetry such as Holiday Kitchens because its certified kitchen designers (CKDs) are the experts compared with a part-time clerk at a big-box retailer," says Wilson. With smaller budgets, paint the cabinets with a spray gun and install an undermount sink to complement a chic backsplash. The home owners chose Aqua Blue two-by-six-inch tiles from Chelsea Arts Tile & Stone and a 94 percent quartz countertop called Silestone by Cosentino. "People love these counters because they are durable, scratch- and scorch-resistant, fight mold, and have a 15-year warranty," Wilson notes. In addition, Energy Star appliances reduce greenhouse gas emissions and can earn you a \$500 lifetime tax credit.

A quality kitchen redo can add up to 40 percent to the value of your home.



Robin likes...

Kohler faucets with the EPA's WaterSense label. "They have the highest level of water efficiency," she says. They use 1.5 gallons per minute instead of the standard 2.2 gallons.



Mirrormate frames give a plain mirror a custom look (above) for less than \$300.



Choose a vanity that is modern, yet classic.



Home Economics

RUN THE NUMBERS

Ask yourself, *How much can I really afford to spend?*

WRITE DOWN YOUR NEEDS

Leaky toilet? Hole in the roof? Fix them first, then tackle the home's aesthetic.

FACTOR IN CONSTRUCTION

Make sure to count the cost of construction, labor, materials and unforeseen issues.

Robin likes...

Pocket doors from companies such as Tru-Stile Doors: "Solid-core primed doors are space savers and worth the money."

4 UPGRADE THE BATH

"Your bathroom should be a spalike retreat," says Wilson. Create big style on a small budget with elegant fixtures, sinks and vanities. Some we like are Kohler's Margaux Shower Head and Botticino's Marble Vanity Top with an Empire Vanity in dark cherry, both shown above, and Kohler's Memoirs Comfort Height Toilet (not pictured). Investing in your kitchen and bath can yield a high return.

BEAUTIFY OUTDOORS

Landscaping your front porch, deck or even your fire escape with vibrant flowers, lighting and water features can add 5 to 10 percent to your home's value. "For the best prices, shop at local nurseries," says Wilson. Buy perennials—plants that regrow annually—as well as evergreens and box hedges. They have a long blooming period and tolerate the heat well. "On outdoor tables, add floating candles, flexible LED light strips [\$4, oznium.com] and centerpieces made of fresh fruit, such as a bowl of lemons," she says.

**Subjects' names and identifying details have been changed.*

Avoid having too many flowering bushes near the patio. They can attract bees.

