

INTERVIEW

# Payton Turner

CO-FOUNDER, GIRLS AT LIBRARY  
CEO, FLAT VERNACULAR  
NEW YORK CITY



When I first came across *Girls At Library* I was immediately taken back to my girlhood—during which—reading was a way to figure myself out and where I fit into the world, as much as it was a safe escape. Looking through the book recommendations and seeing some of my own favorites recurring on many lists (*Little Women!*) I felt like I had found a secret home. I found out later through *mutual friends* at The Wing that *Payton Turner* was the *Girls At Library* co-founder, and then when I met Payton, learned she had a whole other business (*Flat Vernacular*) as well. Payton is also, in my opinion, Kirsten Dunst’s long-lost stoic twin, but that’s another story for another day. I spoke with Payton about the importance of narrative, identifying and acting upon your passions, and what she believes is key to a contented life.



**A designer, a voracious reader, a sort of loner, an artist.**

“In 2010, I co-founded a wallpaper and design company called Flat Vernacular. We create and produce original wallpapers and fabrics, all of which are designed in-house. Running Flat Vernacular is my main job, and on the side, I run Girls At Library as the Editor-in-Chief and Co-founder. I’m a voracious reader and sort of a loner, but I have always connected to my mother and many of my female friends through a mutual love of books. Girls At Library is somewhat of an extension of that special sort of relationship. We interview women who love books and broadcast their recommendations to other women. I also do illustration and design work for private clients.

I used to live in New York City and am now living in southern Connecticut—about one hour and fifteen minutes to New York, door to door. I love it. I think my younger (furious) preteen self who never wanted to live in Suburbia again would ask me, “What are you doing here?” But I’ve come to enjoy less stimulation. It allows me to focus more clearly on my work and take better care of myself.



### **The importance of storytelling**

The intellectual and creative world I've absorbed plays out in a narrative through all of my designs; they tell a story or invite the viewer to think of one themselves. Story is an integral part of my work, whether it's through written word, a phrase, or through a visual such as wallpaper. I see all of those expressive elements as interwoven. It's of paramount importance for people to share their stories:

# Stories connect us to one another and enable us to learn about ourselves and others.

The act of passing stories down, creating traditions and cultures—it's elemental.

We all have our own stories and personal narratives. I'm a pretty private person and I'm working on maintaining that private sensibility while exposing myself creatively. It's a lifetime challenge that will keep changing and I don't think I've quite gotten the hang of it yet. I've also had to learn to identify myself more plainly as an entrepreneur. It's been really important for me to harness my own power. Recently I've refocused on my own work without other voices involved to move away from serial collaboration. This has been a very difficult thing to come to terms with. Sometimes your voice gets drowned out and left behind when you're doing too much collaborating. It's been my biggest change as of late: owning up to responsibility and not being afraid of taking a couple of steps back or being wrong.



### **Identifying and acting on your passion**

I once heard great advice from the designer Tina Roth Eisenberg to pay attention to your side projects and not to dismiss them. I think that's one of the reasons that GAL exists today.

You have to focus on what fascinates you, what sparks a fire within you. Listen to your strongest beliefs and look around to see if something is missing from the world.

When you can identify that feeling, you have an opportunity to come up with something completely original, something that wasn't there previously. Once you know what you need to do, you must believe in it and run with it, and know that it will take time to develop. So much of today's cultural narrative is about how to find the hack, or how to get somewhere faster. The reality is that there are no shortcuts to doing something that is lasting and meaningful. I know this isn't an answer everybody wants to hear, but there's no guidebook to getting it all just right.



### **On the rise of women-driven communities**

I love that it's becoming easier for women to be part of consciousness-raising groups. It's needed to happen for so long. I think that certain new communities in New York and beyond are not inherently anti-men, but are rather openly pro-female. It's absolutely necessary considering how much inequality exists between all genders.



It excites me that people are paying attention. They're thinking about what choices to make, what they're saying, and how involved they are with the larger picture of what's going on in our world. Personally, I've had great luck meeting so many incredible, diverse women. I've found that women give one another the benefit of the doubt automatically. I think that's partially because, for better or worse, it's been hammered into us to be good, quiet listeners. Women listen closely to one another and take one another seriously. Of course, I've had my own negative experiences as a young person—some of which were due to middle-school hormones and misplaced fear or anger—but overall, my friends and I treat one another with so much mutual respect. For the most part I've experienced a willingness to listen and to give help from other women.



It's been a steady theme in my female relationships to share our knowledge and to open our hearts.

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## Valuable learnings

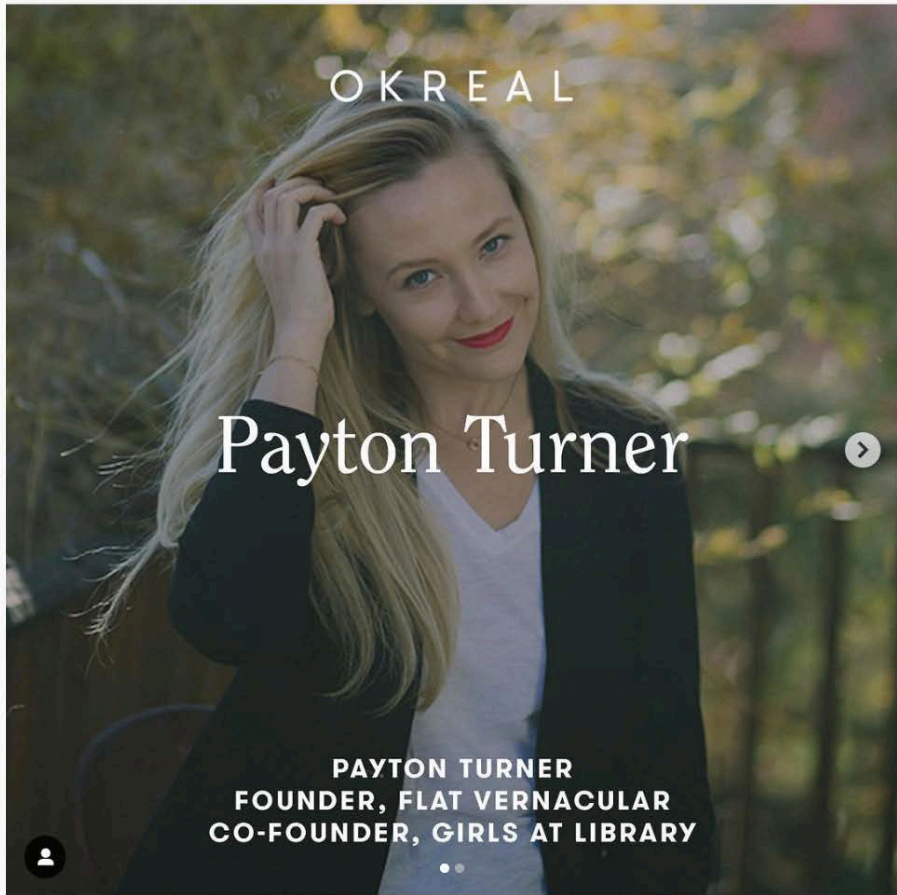
Instead of starting or trying something new with prejudgments, or expecting other people to be defensive or antagonistic, you'll function better assuming positive intent in both business and personal relationships.


Know that things can—and often should—change, even if that change is painful. To realize this is a huge strength, and it's one of the most exciting parts of being alive. Continuous learning is the key to a contented life. You need to constantly find something to be curious about or be interested in.




There was a haunted house at a theme park I used to go to when I was a kid. The ride was called “Laugh in the Dark.” They thought it was a great name for a haunted house ride. I think it’s an apt way to describe so much of life.

Nobody has the perfect answer, and the answers often change. I think that laughing in the dark is a great reminder to use humor, with compassion, whenever you can.”








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 heyokreal 🌟 Take a moment to check out our latest #OKREAL interview with Payton Turner (@paytonturner) — CEO of @flatvernacular and Co-Founder of @girlsatlibrary. Amy (@ameohmy) spoke with Payton about the importance of narrative, identifying and acting upon your passions, and what she believes is key to a contented life. She reminds of timeless wisdom: "Stories connect us to one another and enable us to learn about ourselves and others."

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FEBRUARY 15

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