

A Room With Roots

How design maven Monica Chavez transformed a blank wall in her house into a touching tribute to family

BY DIANA AYDIN



“

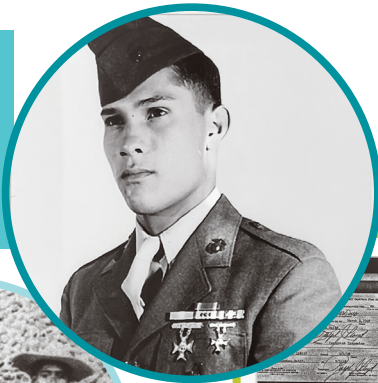
DIY is so trendy now, but for my family and so many Latinos, being scrappy and making something out of nothing has always just been a way of life.

» DIY Ancestry Wall

It started with an idea. “Both my husband and I are Mexican American, and I really wanted to give our kids, 3 and 1, a narrative about how we got here,” says Chavez, who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and documents her home-improvement adventures at @house.of.esperanza on Instagram. Soon Chavez was scouring ancestry websites, old albums, and even church ledgers from Mexico to dig up photographs and documents. The effort was worth it. Chavez now uses the wall—which goes back six generations—as a testament to culture. “It’s my way of passing down stories, so my children never forget our history.”



I want my kids to feel empowered by the amazing men and women who came before them.



«
“I’m a United States Army veteran, and my dad is a U.S. Marine vet who served in Vietnam. I hope my children always look at his military photo with pride.”



“I found this photo of my great-great-grandfather and his sons, who were revolutionaries in Mexico, in my mom’s belongings.”



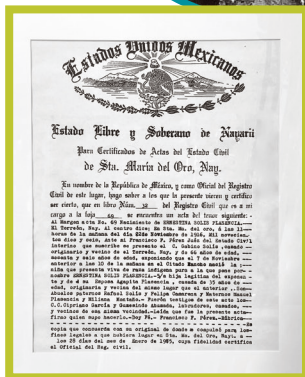
«
“When I was little, we’d take road trips from San Jose, California, to Mexico. I love this photo of my mom with me and my sister. She just looks so cool with that ‘80s mami confidence!”



“A collection of our families’ border crossing cards, including my grandfather’s from 1948”



“My husband’s flapper great-grandmother from the 1920s—I want my kids to see how Latinos have always been a part of America’s history, even if they’re not included in the schoolbooks.”



“This is my grandmother’s birth certificate from El Torreón, Nayarit, Mexico. Every time I look at it, I discover a new detail.”

DOS + DON'TS

Monica Chavez’s guide to creating a gallery wall

DO A TEST RUN

“Before making any nail holes, cut the shapes of your frames out of craft paper and tape them to the wall to see what your layout will look like.”

DON'T RELY JUST ON NAILS

“Before you hang frames, put a little museum putty (a blended rubber-based adhesive) on the back of each so they stick to the wall and you don’t have to always readjust.”

DO SCAN

“If you’d rather not display original documents or photos, use an app such as TurboScan to scan them.”

DON'T FORGET THE KIDS

“While you’re DIY-ing, keep a roll of brown craft paper nearby so kids can doodle. Then put their artwork in the back of the frames for a fun surprise the next time you change out your pictures.”