

## the conversation

## VINCENT VAN DUYSSEN

You could call him the founder of minimaluxe or the most influential designer working today – but, as he tells our editor Pip Rich, just don't call him a minimalist

Iconic designer Vincent Van Duysen founded his architectural studio in Belgium in 1989, coining a look that has taken on a universal appeal that we are now calling minimaluxe. He recently made headlines by working on Kim Kardashian's incredible home.

**PIP RICH** One of the easiest ways to characterise your designs is by the materials you choose – so many of them natural. Stone, wood, linen... why are you drawn to them?

**VINCENT VAN DUYSSEN** Natural materials are the focus of my creations. They instil a sense of serenity and wholeness. I think a significant part of the emotion in my work comes from my consideration for the materials within a space.

**PR** I understand that – I have a real emotional response to your work, a sense of being calmed. But concrete features heavily, too, and couldn't be any more man-made. Why does it sit so well with your natural elements?

**VVD** I like concrete because of its texture, rawness and authenticity. It is a very tactile and versatile material. I used it once at Casa M where, besides the beauty of the material itself, finding the right tonality to blend with the surroundings was a challenge.

**PR** Yes, I can imagine. I've seen a boost recently in coloured concretes – greens, blues, pinks, and they look incredible but the vibe is so different from what you create. Joyfully uplifting, rather than what I'd describe as upliftingly soothing.

**VVD** I am drawn to natural colours like bone, mud, etc., as they are texturised, sensorial and warm, but they also highlight and make visible the features of different surfaces.

**PR** You've been working with these materials for a while but they've really caught on to the wider world more recently. I think you are one of the most influential designers working today and a lot of what is happening in this quest for warm minimalism – or minimaluxe – stems from your vision. Why do you think that how you like to design resonates so strongly right now?

**VVD** I think that has happened because first of all I don't follow trends; I am aware of them, but usually I never adopt the latest fads. In addition to that, I try to step back with my ego and design

spaces or products with mankind in mind – my work is human-centric. Then, there are the elements, materials and colours that I always adopt: they convey a sense of holisticness that make human beings feel protected, comfortable, surrounded by warmth and beauty as if in a shrine or shelter.

**PR** And never before have people craved that sense this much. That sentiment embodies why I believe minimaluxe is the big movement of the moment. We want rooms that hug us. 'Shrine or shelter' – I adore that. What little changes do you think people can make to achieve this?

**VVD** The starting point is to use colours, finishes and materials that soothe the soul. There is no one rule that fits all, but from experience, organic and all natural materials with neutral tones

are key. It's the same thing with furniture: I recommend using timeless designs that are built with tactile and warm materials, as for accessories, and so on.

**PR** I've also heard you say before that 'light is as much a construction material as brick'. So how do you harness the light to its best effect?

**VVD** Exactly! To me, light is as much a construction material as a brick – the interplay is so important when I design because it is the quality of light that sculpts the emotions you feel within a space. In my architecture it is always

a balance between spaces that are bathed in light complemented by spaces that are darker and more subdued.

**PR** Lastly, I think you probably get called a minimalist but minimalism – and the way you design – has evolved so much. I think of it as a celebration of the best things rather than a general lack of things. Is this something you agree with?

**VVD** Yes, I could agree with you because, at the core, I am not into minimalist, sober interiors. I want soul. I believe that my work goes strongly against the soulless, clichéd ideals of minimalism. My attention goes out to a pureness in aesthetics by undoing the clutter and getting to the core.

vincentvandyussen.com

MY WORK CONVEYS  
A SENSE THAT  
MAKES PEOPLE  
FEEL SURROUNDED  
BY WARMTH  
AND BEAUTY AS  
IF IN A SHRINE  
OR SHELTER



At Casa M, the tonality of the concrete was chosen to enhance the overall feel



This penthouse showcases Vincent's love of blending natural materials with textured concrete

PHOTOGRAPHS (PORTRAIT) PIET-ALBERT GOETHALS; (TOP RIGHT) VINCENT VAN DUYSSEN; (RIGHT) MARK SEELEN