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# Minimalism is back – but with a new spin

CALM AND UNCLUTTERED INTERIORS ARE ON TREND AGAIN – BUT THIS TIME AROUND THEY'RE SOFTER AND WARMER

WORDS RACHEL LOOS



CLASHING COLOURS! FLORAL wallpaper! Swagged fabric! Over the past few years, interior design has been in maximalist heaven. Already in the design consciousness before the pandemic, lockdowns poured rocket fuel on the more-is-more trend, our desire to 'bring joy' into our homes seeing us go mad for colour and pattern.

But times they are a-changing and maximalism's opposite number, minimalism, has been making a return. At this year's Salone del Mobile – the interiors trend-setting furniture fair held annually in Milan – many big Italian brands, such as Flexform and Poliform, showcased neutral interiors featuring variations on white, cream and ecru with warm accents of caramel and wood. New homeware collections in the UK are also showing a more pared-back look and this autumn sees the publication of several books on how to do minimalism at home. What's behind the shift? Trends always

Above: Vincent Van Duijzen's collection for Zara Home features natural materials and sculptural pieces. Right: a bedroom featured in *The Soft Minimalist Home*



change as our mood and tastes do. In the '90s, minimalism, which influenced interiors well into the 21st century, was an antidote to funky '70s boho (burnt orange, macramé, swirls) and high-octane '80s glamour (neon brights, animal print and mirrored surfaces). 'But it's also a change in how we see our homes,' says Abi Daré, author of *The Soft Minimalist Home*.

'Following the pandemic, we still want our homes to be a sanctuary, a place to escape from what is going on in the world, but now there is a realisation that a place that feels calm, safe, happy and secure can be more neutral and pared back, but at the same time not cold and with no personality.'

'Too much in a room can be as oppressive as too little,' says interior designer Hollie Bowden, whose designs have an understated elegance. 'There's a point in it that it no longer feels like an open proposition,' she says. 'And that can feel like having something imposed on you.'

All of which means that the new minimalism is different. Last time around, it was a seriously stripped back, almost monastic style with accessories banished from sight. The home of John Pawson, the architect and designer considered to be the king of minimalism, was famously ice cool and empty, with stark white walls and hard, bare surfaces. Today's minimalism is a lot warmer. There's still an emphasis on neutrals,

Above: the new minimalism was on display at this year's Salone del Mobile. Below: Hollie Bowden's interiors are relaxed and sensuous



but colour does feature. Accessories are key, but with an emphasis on thoughtful curation. 'We're seeing a re-tooled minimalism,' says Bowden. 'It's not the frigid, object-phobic minimalism of the '90s, but something more relaxed and sensuous, with a big emphasis on collecting objects with soul. Clients want an interior that feels like a part of their lives, not something that they have to curb their lives to live within.'

This new approach plays into the zeitgeist for thoughtful buying with a focus on investment pieces. Vincent Van Duijzen, known for his clean, timeless aesthetic, has just released his third collection with Zara Home and it features sculptural pieces. 'A more pared-back look gives soul to any environment,' he says. 'That's why my attention is on a pureness in aesthetics, undoing the clutter and getting to the core of what a piece is. My work goes strongly against the soulless clichéd ideals of minimalism. All the products – the first two drops and these new ones – have been designed to stand the test of time and be sympathetic to evolving decor types.'

When Sebastian Conran designed a new 25-piece dining and kitchen collection for Habitat, he too took inspiration from minimalism to create pieces including plain white tableware and shapely glassware.

'Both Leonardo Da Vinci and Coco Chanel are quoted as saying, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication,"' he says. 'All well-designed objects primarily need to be useful; they have a job to do, and they must do it better than the competition and be easy to clean and store as well – a product that works well tends to look right. When'

designing tableware, I prefer to frame the meal and let food and flowers bring the interest and colour.'

However, while neutrals are strong, colour is not banned in the new minimalism. Interior designer Rose Uniacke, whose clients include the Beckhams, is renowned for her minimalist style and neutral colour palette but, she told *The Times*, colour punctuates all her projects, 'not to make statements, but in a natural way so it's warm.'

'Most people associate minimalism with neutral decor, but that certainly doesn't preclude bright colour and pattern,' agrees Dare. 'But the keys to a minimalist interior are simplicity and intentionality, so colours and patterns need to be carefully considered – there might just be one statement pattern, for example. And without lots of visual distractions, colours and patterns will immediately stand out, so it's essential, as with the furniture and accessories you choose, to opt for things that you love and that resonate with you emotionally.'

Also key when curating a new minimalist space is not to rush, says Bowden. 'Take your time. Rather than packing it full of what's trendy, minimalism is about finding the essence of a space for a timeless look.'



Curating soulful objects (above) and using textured surfaces (below) softens the edges of the new minimalism



## HOW TO NAIL SOULFUL MINIMALISM

**Texture:** 'Use contrasting textures to create a welcoming and cosy room that looks interesting – hard with soft materials, smooth with tactile and almost rough,' says Dare.

**Materials:** look for pieces in wood, natural fabrics and warm metals, such as brass. 'Organic and natural materials can make a person feel embraced, protected and serene,' says Van Duysen.

**Lighting:** 'Use lots of different warm lights – I try not to use a light temperature of more than 2800k,' says Conran. And place them at different levels, with floor lamps and those on tables especially important.

**Colour:** 'Step away from trending/prescriptive ideas and find a colour that really resonates with you,' says Dare. 'Then find a variation of that hue that works in your space.'

**Furniture and accessories:** choose carefully. 'The pieces in your room need to have that quiet confidence that draws you in close to make an impact,' says Bowden.



Vase, £34.99, H&M Home

Cushion, £42.40, Abigail Ahern

Candle, £64, August & Piers

Blanket, £199, Print Sisters Archive

GET THE LOOK  
Soft power

Decanter, £18, Sebastian Conran at Habitat

Sheepskin chair, £1,499, Where Saints Go

Lamp, £280, Hannah Simpson Studio

Coffee table, £595, Nkuku

Jug, £95, Sharland England