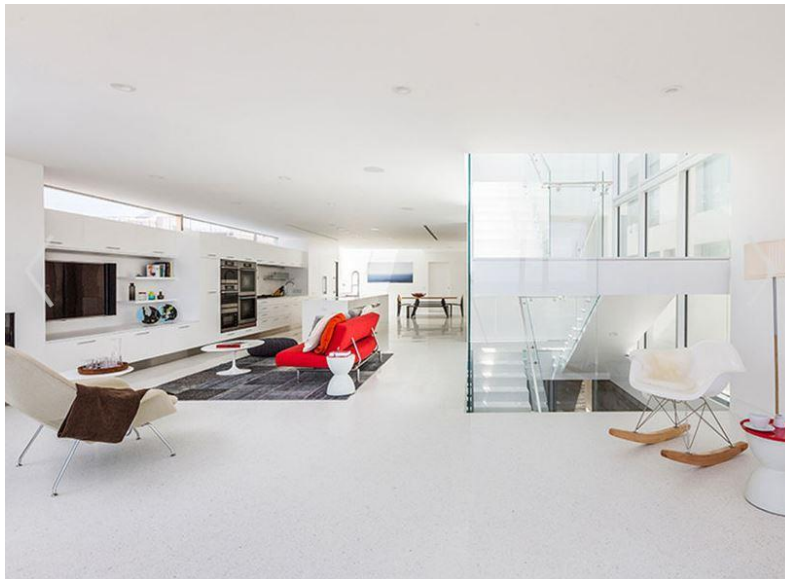


Minimalist Living Appeals to Those Who Have It All

Architects and designers find modern tastes skewing simpler

BY JENNIFER TZESES ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON MARCH 01, 2017 | [MANSION GLOBAL](#)



In Dan Brunn's Zig Zag House, built-ins and terrazzo flooring in a singular hue create a streamlined flow.
BRANDON SHIGETA 1/5


In its most basic form, minimalism is a way to live simply. It's the stripping away of clutter and excess to focus on form and function. Severe to some, but to an increasing number of people, minimalist living brings a sense of order and harmony to our chaotic world.

"All along the economic spectrum, people have come to realize that quality is more important than quantity," said Nancy J. Ruddy, co-founder and executive director of interior design at CetraRuddy based in New York. "A trend toward greater informality and simplicity can be seen throughout our society."

Even the "super-wealthy" are embracing this way of life.

"Clients who particularly ask for a minimalist design usually have an impressive art collection, and they request that the furniture, fabrics, and finishes do not compete with the art," said designer Jeffrey Beers of Jeffrey Beers International, also based in New York. "Minimalist design inherently frames and emphasizes paintings, photography, and sculptures."




The final result is a much more clean-lined home that reflects an open loft filled with light and air, as well as an elegant gallery. People are also taking responsibility for consumption and the negative effect it can have on the environment, Mr. Beers added. 

Dan Brunn, AIA principal of Dan Brunn Architecture in Los Angeles, said that with success and responsibility comes more restraint. “When you can have it all, the best decision is to cut the clutter. My clients tend to do that,” Mr. Brunn said.

The minimalist design effect

Minimalist design first gained prevalence in the 1950s, thanks to the works of architects such as Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, Charles Gwathmey, and many more, said architect Mark Zeff, the founder of interdisciplinary architecture and design firm MARKZEFF in Brooklyn, New York. “Fallingwater by Frank Lloyd Wright and The Glass House by Philip Johnson are probably the two best early examples of this movement in residential architecture in America,” Mr. Zeff said.

Today, adapting a minimalist aesthetic within the home can mean different things to different people. Mr. Beers describes the look as a paring down of materiality to its most basic and natural form, with clean and perpendicular lines. 

“The overall color scheme is very simple and calming, as it reflects the tones found in earth’s natural elements: earth, metal, wood, etc,” he said.

For example, within the lobby of One West End, a new luxury residential tower in Manhattan, Mr. Beers designed walls made of Italian silver Travertine that were meticulously vein matched, and added built-in custom walnut shelving. “The space has a minimalist monolithic feel, as if it were carved out of a stone quarry,” Mr. Beers said. 

Mr. Brunn incorporates built-ins throughout his residential projects, such as Zig Zag House and Flip Flop House, two homes he recently designed in Venice Beach, California, to produce a streamlined effect. He also hides mechanics to create a seamless experience of space.

“Technology and structure play a big part in eliminating distractions because exposed building mechanics can run the risk of showing age,” Mr. Brunn said.


He also prefers terrazzo flooring. “I love that it’s seamless without interruptions,” he said. “Often, the floor plane is interrupted with joints. However, with terrazzo, a continuous plane can be created, much like a ceiling. One’s eye is not distracted by the textures and lines of the floor, nor does it have directionality, like wood flooring.”

Architect Andrew Kotchen, founding principal of Workshop/APD in New York, relies on materials, surfaces and textures to create flow from one space to another, so that each room in the home provides a holistic journey.

“You are not met with abrupt changes in color, form, etcetera, that create an uneasy feeling,” Mr. Kotchen said. “The home takes on a unified story that can seamlessly integrate context with design.”

Minimalism in the kitchen

With so many pots and pans, spices and accessories, the kitchen can often be a haven for clutter. Mr. Beers opts for deep-toned, patterned, and textured materiality found in nature to achieve a polished and tailored look rather than a bare feel. 

For example, Mr. Beers worked in tandem with Italian fabricator Scavolini on the kitchens at One West End. The result was organization and high functionality with subtle, elegant touches like a four-inch ledge behind the stove (for salt and pepper, oil and vinegar etc.) and a baking scale built into one of the drawers accessed by the simple pull of a handle. 

“When designing open living spaces, it is important to consider the visual impact a kitchen can have on the home,” Mr. Kotchen said. For example, within Printing House, a townhouse he designed in New York City, “We created simple volumes and surfaces with impactful details and materials.”

Carefully considered materials including oak, patina steel, and marble provide what Mr. Kotchen calls, “a crafted minimalist/ modernist space”.

Emerging trends

New technologies are allowing for new trends to emerge.

Patterning and textures in digital fabrication provide new techniques for generating surfaces within the home. “We can achieve unique filtered light experiences, millwork modules, floating planes, etcetera, that were not possible 10 years ago,” Mr. Kotchen said. “The ability to manipulate stone, steel, and wood has freed up designers to change the home.”

Mr. Zeff, for one, uses Bolon, a Swedish floor covering made from woven rubber. Large format porcelain tiles are now being made in Europe for both flooring and wall coverings. “These greatly simplify installation by reducing the number of grout lines and the need for cutting,” Mr. Zeff said.

For a home in Sagaponack, New York, Mr. Zeff used white-painted wood plank walls to achieve a minimalist barn-like feel furthered by a hanging spun aluminum fireplace.

Ms. Ruddy has also seen an increase in open storage designs. “We are designing storage elements, such as bookshelves and kitchen cabinetry in more open forms that create a lighter composition,” she said. By revealing the wall material behind, the effect creates a sense of airiness and personalization, said Ms. Ruddy.



The travertine walls and walnut shelving of One West End's lobby, designed by Jeffrey Beers, have an organic quality.
EVANS JOSEPH 2/5



Built-in shelving, like this slot inside a kitchen island designed by Andrew Kotchen for a townhouse in New York City, makes for clever storage and impactful design.
DONNA DOTAN PHOTOGRAPHY 3/5



Open shelving “creates a lighter composition” in the living room, said designer Nancy J. Ruddy.
METROLOFT 4/5



Painted white plank walls and a floating fireplace create a modern minimalist vibe in this Sagaponack home designed by architect Mark Zeff.
ERIC LAIGNEL 5/5