

ELMINATE OR EXAGGERATE?

How minimalism and maximalism shape our personal style.

by Victoria Montalti

Does your wardrobe resemble a capsule collection? Do sleek lines and neutral tones fill your apartment? Has Marie Kondo motivated you to rid yourself of the “stuff” that consumes your life? Do you follow Coco Chanel’s rule of taking one item off before walking out the door?

These are signs that you are a minimalist.

Or do baubles dangle from your wrist and stack on your nightstand? Are layers upon layers of mixed prints and patterns an inspiration to you? Does your skincare routine include eighteen calculated steps? Do you live by the motto “more is more”?

Then you, my friend, are a maximalist.

It’s more likely that you fall somewhere on the spectrum between these two extremes. And what you choose to minimize and maximize in your life may say a lot more about you than you think.

Elements of personal style like beauty, clothing, décor and more can have a funny way of signaling one’s values.

The philosophy of minimalism is that the most basic components of life can sustain and fulfill you. For instance, for beauty products, organic skincare ingredients do the job and minimal makeup looks enhance your natural features, so you may feel that there is no reason to journey into the realm of Instagrammable skincare collections and heavy contouring. How Parisian of you.

The philosophy of maximalism is that to live in excess is an appropriate and desirable path. It can encompass extreme quantity or extreme detail. So perhaps you find yourself buying into fast fashion on a whim and choosing to

From top to bottom: Steve Jobs, Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, Meghan Markle, Diana Vreeland, Iris Apfel

Aesthetics: neutral color palette, classic silhouettes, sleek lines
Values: refinement, quality, sustainability

Aesthetics: essential garments, monochromatic, uniformity
Values: curated collections, modernity, practicality

Aesthetics: anything from a unique blazer to a casual ball gown
Values: balance, options, trends

Aesthetics: dramatic forms, editorial, novelty
Values: contrast, ornateness, pronouncement

Aesthetics: bright colors, patterns, layers
Values: detail, quantity, embellishment

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invest in a thrift shop find rather than a streamlined IKEA staple. Maximalism is the expression of eccentricities where taste can cross into distastefulness. The underlying theme is to fill every moment. The point is exaggeration.

Is minimalism impractical? Is maximalism wasteful? Where do you fit in on the spectrum?

Our relationships with simplistic and superfluous fashions as consumers reflect our values and can be linked to the art genres that have since morphed into lifestyle guides.

Minimalism is an art movement that rose to popularity in 1960s NYC and is marked by sparseness. A restraint in detail and focus on large, simplistic forms—whether in sculpture or clothing proportions—are at the epicenter of this avant-garde movement. Minimalist artists evolved from previous popular art to purge their works of any overstimulation.

Linear. Lines. Logic. Linear. Lines. Logic. And so the minimalistic pattern goes on.

Of course, other prominent art movements followed, including Post-Minimalism, but minimalist aesthetics constantly persist and make themselves known. Whether in the form of stark neutrals or bold primaries, the objective approach of minimalism still fervently lives on and inspires today.

Comme des Garçons is one of the most notable pioneers of minimalist fashion. The sleek lines and neutral color palette created by Rei Kawakubo is a praised no-fuss-no-muss collection of luxury wardrobe essentials. Others like Japanese fashion designer Issey Miyake and Austrian fashion designer Helmut Lang have also famously taken hold of this concept and successfully latched on.

Today, brands like the sustainably-centric Everlane and Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen’s carefully curated and monochromatic label, The Row, are popular minimalist options. They are at the crossroads where modernity becomes classical.

Conversely, maximalism is the antithesis of minimalism. It’s loud. It’s radical. It’s kitschy. It announces itself. Maximalism contradicts the subtleties of minimalism through its foundation of emotion.

The style is epitomized by evidently juxtaposing colors, prints, and proportions along with unapologetic exaggeration. Its artists usually take the approach of creating compositions with erratic yet intricate elements that swallow up white space.

Underrated icon Iris Apfel could be the poster child for maximalism. At a cool 98 years old, the businesswoman adorns herself with oversized spectacles and beads upon bangles upon baubles.

A disregard for the norm serves as inspiration for her fashion sense and interior decorating skills.

Other maximalist figureheads in the fashion industry include the likes of Iris van Herpen, Dries van Noten, Viktor & Rolf, Giambattista, and Jeremy Scott for both his namesake brand and for Moschino. All of their designs push the envelope and explore the absolute max of what is acceptable or even functional to wear in public. An example comes directly from the Moschino S/S ’20 RTW runway, where the looks embodied Pablo Picasso’s paintings. From multi-colored prints and extraordinary sleeves to a violin bodice and model silhouetted picture frames, maximalism reigned.

Maybe you’ve perfected polished refinement and sleek subtlety. Maybe you’ve mastered contrasting colors and excessive embellishment. Maybe you sit neatly in between these two extremes. But nothing remains as is. Art evolves, values modify, and in turn, personal preferences fortify.

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