

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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Saturday/Sunday, January 28 - 29, 2017 | D1



CONTROLLED CHAOS
This richly rowdy family game room, designed by Marks and Frantz, exemplifies the emerging aesthetic that is making minimalist spaces seem tired and barren.

MARCO RICCA

Mad Maximalism

After decades of formulaic and easy-on-the-eyes interiors, design is giving way to a luxurious riot of color and pattern. Here, guidelines on pulling off this seemingly lawless, too-much-is-more style

BY JULIE LASKY

SACHA WALCKHOFF, a Paris-based fashion and product designer, was astonished when the wildly floral wallpapers he introduced in lime green and fuchsia two years ago became big sellers. “Even me, I would think twice about using them,” he confided.

That says a lot. Mr. Walckhoff is creative direc-

tor of Christian Lacroix, the French fashion house with a mile-wide streak of flamboyance. The colorful, pattern-mad brand, which six years ago began producing home décor, has always appealed to people with courage, but in the last two years, Mr. Walckhoff noted, public appetite for his visual extremes has grown—at least, judging by the number of interiors on Pinterest tagged with Lacroix textiles, tableware and furniture. “People are really getting wild,” he said.

Indeed, the controlled crazy that is maximalism, a layered décor style packed with delightfully disparate elements, is taking hold. Chinoiserie, tassels and zebra prints share space. Ornate inherited furniture is rehabilitated. Design websites help readers diagnose a state of excess. (“Your favorite color is everything,” reads one sign you might be a maximalist on design website Apartment Therapy. “You went to Versailles and

Please turn to page D4

[INSIDE]



THE MUST CRUST

Pide, a Turkish relation of pizza, is among the most flexible of foods **D7**

PLUG-IN PRIMERS

Electric beauty gadgets have come a long way **D3**



VOICING CONCERNS

Controlling kids' use of Amazon's speech-activated Alexa **D9**

TENDER IS A NIGHT IN BALTIMORE

The city's once-grand Mount Vernon neighborhood was home to F. Scott Fitzgerald. Now it's a resurgent destination **D5**



DESIGN & DECORATING

OVER-THE-TOP-NOTCH DÉCOR

Continued from page D1

thought it was a little underwhelming.”)

The look is luxe, manic—even a bit Auntie Mame. (Marie Kondostyle purging be damned.) It takes notes from midcentury Los Angeles decorator Tony Duquette, who filled homes and movie sets—it was hard to tell the difference—with Venetian gondolas and 28-foot-tall sculptures of archangels. Also a progenitor: Yves Saint Laurent, who paired art deco club chairs with leopard and tiger pillows in his Left Bank duplex, and whose mid-70s “Russian” fashion collection brought purple velvet, folk embroidery and pattern-on-pattern ebullience to the runway.

Then the poles reversed. In the 1990s, minimalist décor flourished alongside Apple Computer’s pale streamlined products. Frosty white rooms housed spare modernist furniture, reissues or knockoffs. Just picture serial killer Patrick Bateman’s art-gallery-meets-corporate-waiting-room apartment in the 2000 film “American Psycho.”

But winter can’t last forever. Up burbled more-personal styles like Bohemianism and Domino magazine’s eclecticism, which favored the flea-market find. Warmer, woodier midcentury pieces edged out stainless steel Barcelona chairs. The Brooklyn aesthetic celebrated rooms with rough industrial finishes and the hand-hewn.

Maximalism takes these alternatives to minimalism and throttles them up to a whole new level of complexity and splendor, much as Gucci’s Alessandro Michele, the godfather of the fashion world’s take on this movement, has glamorously, eccentrically mismatched patterns and color since his acclaimed 2015 collection debut. Milan-based Cabana magazine, launched in 2014, similarly raised the design scene’s appreciation of old-world sumptuousness, a key factor in the mix.

Maximalist spaces reflect their occupants’ travels, pasts and quirks. Claire Bingham, author of “A Beautiful Mess: Celebrating the New Eclecticism” (*teNeus*, April), describes them as “‘follow-your-own-path’ interiors.” The rooms, she writes, “are far from precious. They are about having fun.”

New York designer and antiques dealer David Duncan lauds these interiors as an antidote to “sterile hotel-like” home environments: “Nothing says ‘I didn’t know what else to do,’ like a monochromatic room with a ‘pop of color.’”

This March, Bergdorf Goodman will begin carrying collections from London’s five-year-old House of Hackney, founded by Javvy M. Royle and Frieda Gormley, a married pair of recovering minimalists. The duo reacted to the digital revolution much as William Morris reacted to the Industrial Revolution—by championing nature-themed local manufacturing. Their company, which sells furniture, accessories and fashions, some with patterns adapted from Morris, has become a hunting ground for maximalist lovers of floral prints and fringed lampshades.

This yearning for color and ornament hasn’t been lost on bigger design companies. In October, CB2,



Ornate but Not Overly Feminine

“This is a look that can turn granny,” said designer Michelle Nussbaumer of the chock-a-block design of her Dallas home’s library, as seen in “Wanderlust: Interiors That Bring the World Home” (Rizzoli). Masculine gestures avoid that pitfall. Large grouped porcelains, rather than a diaspora of trinkets, fill the table. An antler chandelier, male portrait, leopard ottoman and black 1940s Italian chest balance femininity. And the three upholstered side chairs hang together because they are covered in Ms. Nussbaumer’s Sulaman fabric. “The repeat is so big, each chair looks different,” she said.



Hewed to a Hue

After 15 years of working professionally with neutrals, designer Alexa Hampton decided she had to have fun with her and her husband’s Manhattan bedroom. “My version of maximalist is to have a lot of the same color, which allowed me to mix disparate elements but have a veneer of similitude.” All purple are: custom Gracie suede-like wallpaper, velvet exterior and paisley interior bed curtains, a textured headboard and the carpet. The orange mirror-work bedspread, from the previous mostly white incarnation of the room, worked in the purple version and provided a second color. “You need some contrast,” said Ms. Hampton, who added an orange rug so the bed doesn’t disappear against the carpet. Pink in the bedcover appears in the lamp shade and bolster on the bed. Said Ms. Hampton of the room: “It delights me because it’s so wacky.”



Scaled Up and Down

In the dining room of this New York townhouse, the wide color palette includes green, pink, gold and red. “But mixing different scales makes it harmonious,” said designer Kati Curtis. The needlepoint rug is a large-scale floral, the banquette a more compact, intricate stripe and the moth motifs on the Timorop Beasties wallpaper are so widely spaced it acts almost as a solid backdrop for the patterned plates. Neutrals, such as the off-white side and arm chairs, give the eye somewhere to rest, as does the transparent glass and Plexiglas table, which also lends the room some edge.

until recently rooted in sedate modernism, released an extroverted collection by British fashion designer Matthew Williamson, including a \$1,400 brass-legged sofa covered in a florid blue tropical print. Mr. Williamson’s pieces are “by far the most colorful and pattern-heavy we’ve ever done,” said CB2 managing director Ryan Turf, “but once it came together, it felt sophisticated and very fresh.” He reports the collection sold 15% to 20% above expectations.

In November, Herman Miller opened its first North American retail store, in Manhattan. In room-like tableaux, dozens of new and vintage objects—wooden dolls, primitive masks, spools of thread, house plants—warm up the classic pieces by George Nelson and Charles and Ray Eames. The maximalist arrangement worked like a shot of adrenaline to invigorate what many consider tired, ubiquitous designs. The knickknacks were meant to look organically accumulated rather than installed, said Jennie Maneri, Herman Miller’s creative director for consumer business. “We want to teach people that there’s this different kind of modernism,” she said. “It can be personal.”

Even the 2017 catalog for IKEA, that temple of bare-bones functionality, shows a dancer with very un-Scandinavian ruffled sleeves twirling in a moodily lit space among patterned curtains and floral-upholstered seating. “If you want your living room to be a flamenco club, then do it—fearlessly,” the copy advises, an exhortation one’s downstairs neighbor might not appreciate.

Brooklyn designer Starrett Ringbom, of Starrett Hoyt, blames the torrents of home images on social media and in design catalogs for creating this thirst for the unique. “I think it is hard for anything to feel special or luxurious when you’ve seen the same living room, or a variation thereof, 100 times before.” And though New York designer Alexa Hampton appreciates the democratizing of design that retailers like Restoration Hardware brought about, she also admits that “after having the same coffee table, or sofas with the same arm, we all get the urge to shout, ‘This is my room!’” and create a space like her purple bedroom, at left.

The internet has also globalized the marketplace, making accessible the vintage Iranian rugs and Moroccan tiles maximalism calls for. Might the web threaten to overexpose this look as well? Perhaps, but the idiosyncratic combining of personal collections and beloved objects seems less in danger of homogenization than beigneness was.

In any case, maximalism suits our era. We’re uncertain about the economy, the climate, the future. Our instinct is to retreat somewhere soft and protective, not stark and uncompromising. “With all the terrible news these days,” said designer Jessica Helgerson, in Portland, Ore., “it probably feels better to burrow into a cozy den.”

Is there anything Ms. Helgerson considers a drawback to maximalist rooms?

Indeed. “More dusting!”



WALL OF PROFUSION
Framed 16th- and 17th-century tiles, a fragment of Ushak medallion carpet and antique African vessels contribute to a densely layered floral display.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MELANIE ACEVEDO, ERIC PIASECKI/TRUNK, MIGUEL FLORES-VIANINA, SCOTT FREIHON

THE MAXIMALIST LIST

Martina Mondadori Sartogo, editor and founder of Cabana, enumerates 10 key elements of the magazine’s lush and layered aesthetic, a visual vocabulary credited with bringing maximalism into the mainstream

1 Pass on pastels. Bold colors such as burgundy, royal blue, saffron, terra-cotta, magenta and bottle green are more in keeping with this untimid look.

2 Embellish the walls. Hand-painted decoration and stencils inspired by centuries-old Turkish and Russian structures and Renaissance Italian palazzi add richness.

3 Look down. As shoes are important in defining both women’s and men’s style, so is a carpet in a room. My favorite styles are the straw and leather ones made in Mauritania, Bessarabian rugs made in Moldavia and Eastern Europe, and kilims.

4 Seek out the unique. Vintage textiles, for example. Source pieces at specialized boutiques, flea markets or auctions. If you are lucky enough to find a large piece (maybe

a vintage embroidered suzani), hang it on the wall as an art work or use it as a curtain to separate two rooms.

5 Provoke with pattern. Play with different prints. Apply a mix to sofas, perhaps one pattern on the sofa fabric and another on the cushions. Do the same with walls.

6 Start a collection. And become obsessive with it. A few ideas: vintage books, hand-painted ceramics, wicker objects, marquetries, tiles (have them framed and then hang them), drawings, boxes. There is more than just contemporary art out there, and older pieces are often much cheaper. It is hard for a collection to look like hoarding because once you display the items together, they look good as a “family” of objects.

7 Fill your rooms with ‘stuff.’ You don’t want your house to

look immaculate. By stuff, I mean: books (tons, please), collections, flea market finds, curiosities from antique shops.

8 Always add flowers. Any room looks better with them but not a manicured bouquet. Go for the wild bunch.

9 See the gold in old. Use an inherited chest of drawers next to your bed or in the dining room to store linens. A family piece immediately gives a sense of a lived-in home, as opposed to a house where every piece of furniture has been made new.

10 Be patient. Rome wasn’t built in a day. Homes develop over years, as you layer in your collections and antique-market finds and memorabilia from traveling. It is that patina of time that creates personality and charm.