



The home of former fashion editor Lucinda Chambers. She likens her interiors to attending a party: "Putting pattern, print, shape and form together produces very lively conversations," she says.

THE JOY OF STUFF

'Curated maximalism' is interiors talk for having more things, albeit carefully chosen. But how much is too much? And what if lean and clean floats your boat?

WORDS BY CLAIRE BRAYFORD

My grandmother-in-law had rooms in her home that no-one ever entered, bedrooms piled so high with stuff that only a square foot of empty floor space remained. When we began clearing the clutter after she died, a Chinoiserie tea set possibly used on Captain Cook's voyages and gobstopper-sized diamonds were among the joys buried in the junk, alongside a sense of wasted opportunity.

Today, "intentional clutter" or "curated maximalism", the trend for conversation-sparking, artfully arranged objects, is one of the key movements in interiors.

Pinterest predicts "mix and maximalist" will be one of the biggest searches for 2025, while interior designers such as Laura Gonzalez and Martin Brudnizki are celebrated for

their more-is-more mindsets.

But this ebullient mood does raise a question: do more things create more stress? Would a minimalist outlook bring greater calm and peace?

One who has mastered the art of cultivating beauty from chaos is former UK *Vogue* fashion director Lucinda Chambers, who features in the book *This Creative Life: Fashion Designers at Home*, by photographer and writer Robyn Lea. Chambers is the co-founder of shopping platform Collagerie, and her house is a Crayola-bright blend of eclectic finds, including a floor-to-ceiling wall of textiles amassed from the age of 12.

"For me, it's a bit like walking into a party and seeing different people," she explains of her London home. "You wouldn't want everyone to be the same. I love car boots, vintage markets and

discovering the different crafts of a country. My husband thinks I'm greedy for sensations; I find it restful – I couldn't live in it otherwise."

The premise of intentional maximalism is the old William Morris adage, "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." It takes the Marie Kondo principle of asking whether an item "sparks joy" without having to throw out everything else in the process. Intention is key: each item has to have its place.

"The things in my home have a reason behind them – they have been painted, drawn or created by people I know, and therefore it's like having friends all around you and is rather cosy," explains UK interior designer Nina Campbell. "Editing is the key to stopping it from

Photography by Robyn Lea

becoming overwhelming – as well as great storage. You have to sort every so often and that is quite difficult, so you need somewhere to store things because you don't want to get rid of pieces you might want to use at different moments."

Perhaps one reason maximalism does not equate to more stress is because it's based on the idea that a home should not be too precious. You have to be able to sling yourself onto a sofa and put your feet up; it cannot be so pristine that you live in fear of spilling a drink. As Chambers says: "Comfort is really underrated."

"So long as surfaces aren't cluttered and you can move from room to room without tripping, go for it" – YSG Studio's Yasmine Ghoniem

It was in the late 1950s that the term minimalism gained wider use, and we explored the idea of being more with less. A reaction against abstract expressionism, this new wave of minimalist artists thought that art should not refer to the emotional state, but be stripped of external motives and meaning.

There is a place today for the minimalist look, especially its respect for light and space and contrasting textures. "For me, minimalism isn't just about simplicity but more about intention," says British-Nigerian artist and interior designer Mminat Shodeinde of her enviably serene spaces. "I always return to thoughtful arrangements and a considered mix of materials to create this feeling. The world is so chaotic, and our homes should be an antidote to this: a careful curation of objects where each has a place, a purpose and a sense of belonging. Maximalist style can bring sensory overload. When taken to the extreme, it can feel less personal and more theatrical."

William Smalley, architect and author of the book *Quiet Spaces*, goes one step further and describes a physical reaction to effusive design (I can't imagine his thoughts on my grandmother-in-law's house). "I find extraneous objects that serve no purpose and give no joy stressful to be around," he says. "There is no peace to be found for me in a busily patterned room. I am related to people whose whole houses make me feel queasy, but I don't want to be indiscreet. A good indicator of how my stress levels are going to be in a space is the number of loose cushions stacked on the back of a sofa [or pillows on a bed] that have to be taken off before you can sit down and

have to be a rearranged when you get up. And I don't get on well with windows that have curtain 'treatments'. Calm, serene, quiet, space are some of my favourite words. And conversely, cluttered, busy, oppressive, unnecessary and extraneous make me feel tense. I get that other people feel the exact opposite, threatened by quiet and discomforted by emptiness. It's just the way I am."

This seesaw between maximalism and minimalism is said to reflect economic and social influences. In a downturn, style becomes more austere, in boom times more frivolous and

decorated. This may be an oversimplification but it does play into the story.

There was a sense, in the '50s certainly, that minimalism was not just the most tasteful way to live but also morally superior – the sign of a balanced mind. Yet a maximalist would ask, "What are they hiding? Is it not all an illusion of calm with no room for broken colouring crayons or messy feelings?"

Kondo's anti-clutter movement, where we purged our possessions, was in itself stressful: pack up all your things, and if you haven't wanted them after a month discard them; digitise your photos; colour coordinate your sock drawer.

The director of Sydney's YSG Studio, Yasmine Ghoniem, famed for her sun-filled spaces, believes in using intense colour and texture, combined with decorative objects, to create a harmonious, lived-in patina.

"Colour amplifies mood, which is why we often drench walls and even ceilings in it," she explains. "Textural surfaces settle you in the moment, they activate the senses when you touch them, slowing down an active mind – think of a nubby wool-upholstered couch. Pattern also ignites the imagination, and we're all for that. All these things don't add clutter to a room but they certainly bring personality. So long as kitchen surfaces and desks aren't cluttered and you can move from room to room without tripping, go for it."

After all, such pleasure is to be had in curating and arranging the things we love.

As the English poet John Keats put it: "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness."