

# Maximalism

## We've All Heard Of Minimalism, But What Is Maximalism?

Basically, you could say it is the exact opposite. In interior design, maximalism design stems from the mindset of "more is better" creating rooms that are often punctuated with bright colors, numerous patterns, textures, and a sense of luxury.



JAMES McDONALD PHOTOGRAPHY

**The antithesis of minimalism**, and a reaction to the mid-century movement, maximalism is a lush style that is all about layering—from layers of collected objects, multiple patterns in contrasting colors, graphics or scale, to incorporating an array of decoration. It can be seen as "eclectic" or even "eccentric," but it is always a state of curated excess.

It should not be a mass of chaotic clutter that screams, "I follow a maximalist style!" or showcases items that have eluded the dust bin for the last 20 years either. It is an art.

**Maximalism** was coined in the 1970s by art historian Robert Pincus-Witten to describe a group of artists, including Julian Schnabel and David Salle, to express getting out of the long period of minimalism in art and design. This style celebrated richness and excess in graphic design and opened the door to extremes in personal expression in other artistic disciplines.

One of the more famous artist-designers to embody this style in his work is **Tony Duquette**. He worked in the film industry in the 1940s creating costumes, jewelry, and interiors for MGM and many of the day's prominent producers and directors before serving in the U.S. Army during WWII. After the war, he was the first American artist to have a one-man show at the Louvre. His approach to using his personally collected but dissimilar furnishings, fabrics and accessories from his decades of European travel, was his visual trademark. I admire his work and his ability to pull together items that would seem incompatible, into stunning and well-edited rooms.

Mr. Duquette was 85 years old when he passed away in Los Angeles in 1999. Per his wishes, the Tony Duquette Studios, Inc., continues under the direction of his business partner, Hutton Wilkinson.

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*A little too much is just enough for me! I like opulent, maximalist rooms, and I like to use one-of-a-kind elements.*

— Hutton Wilkinson

**I enjoy designing homes where my clients have been able to collect items and furnishings from their travels, interests, and family histories.**

People who gravitate towards maximalism generally have strong personalities. It is a style for those who feel a room minimally decorated is just not enough for them. Some would say they just don't feel complete unless their rooms are filled with their assemblages of art, furniture, and decorations. I would add that they celebrate their lives and personalities through their accumulation of what captures their interests, thereby creating a very personal space.

**Jonathan Rachman** is a designer who designed a room for the 2019 SF Designer Showcase House. This is a great example of maximalism reinterpreted today, some 70 years from Mr. Duquette's era.



JONATHAN RACHMAN DESIGN

I see it as a great challenge and joy to take on maximalist spaces. One needs to be careful not to turn maximalism into kitsch. Below are a few pointers to help you avoid common mistakes when trying to evoke the maximalist vibe.

**Mismatched pieces are the name of the game.**



DESIGNER - MICHELLE NUSSBAUMER  
PHOTOGRAPHY - MELANIE ACEVEDO

**Michelle Nussbaumer** masterfully incorporates pattern and texture. The irony here is that you don't have to completely redecorate a room to give it a maximalist look but, to create an overstated, luxurious look without living in a clutter-filled zone with mismatched pieces is not an easy task. You can end up with what looks like a garage sale. It may help to hire a helping hand to work to balance the color, pattern, and scale. There are key elements in a design you will want to incorporate. **Symmetry will bring a sense of balance, and motif will link the space together** by drawing your eyes naturally from one area to the next.

I would start by considering what you love and what you want to surround yourself with.

**Then decide on the primary color**, which will ground the other colors you put against it. I recommend that you begin with a simple palette on your walls, floors and if you're adding new furniture, the same. The palette should be analogous or complementary colors or, you could go monochromatic and let the color come only from the furnishings, which will produce a somewhat more organized feel.

From there, **I would enhance with accent colors in texture and patterns**. If you already have pieces you want to incorporate, then your palette and scale will determine itself in many ways, but you can be creative in the placement and use of those pieces. Great patterns will add an exuberant aesthetic to a maximalist interior.



JONATHAN RACHMAN DESIGN



JONATHAN RACHMAN DESIGN

**The finishing touches for maximalism** are highly decorative pieces, textural overlays, heavy ornamentation, baroque frames, floral embellishments (real or faux), curated collections (photos, boxes, tableware, books, sculptures, etc.) and large vases. Modern and graphic art is prevalent today as is bold, glamorous photography. Just make sure it's art you can live with every day.



DESIGNER - MICHELLE NUSSBAUMER  
PHOTOGRAPHY - STEPHEN KABLISCH

I realize this style does not encourage you to purge, and it is not a style I would recommend if you hate to dust but, it does enable you to live with your favorite things on display, and it is a way to showcase and share your life experiences with others.

**Study this style carefully**, and you will begin to see its organization, especially in color. It takes a brave homeowner to tackle this style but your home, it will never be boring.

Vivre la vie!  
Lauren Jacobsen Design



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