

A maximalist's guide to minimalism

[Fran Carruthers](#) makes a tentative foray into the growing trend of minimalist fashion and lifestyle

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Disclosure: I am hardly the ideal advocate for minimalist fashion. I like my prints bold, my colours bright and my fabrics impractically ostentatious, and in spite of my best efforts, I still have to force my (admittedly tiny) drawers shut as they bulge with clothing. So no-one was more shocked than I was when I became drawn towards minimalism.

Minimalism is a lifestyle based upon the premise of living with only what we need; valuing every item we have, rather than surrounding ourselves with unnecessary stuff. My first insight into minimalism came from watching the documentary *Minimalism: A Documentary about the Important Things* (2015). Created by friends Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, the pair bonded when they decided to eschew the traditional American Dream, in favour of drastically downsizing their material possessions and touring the US to share their less-is-more philosophy.

While the film is unbearably cliché at points, it delivers a profound message about the impact of advertising on our lives. Watching a montage of shoppers pushing each other aside to grab bargains on Black Friday, I realised two things. Number one: I am not that bad. Number two: as much as I would like to

deny it, I too am within the same spectrum of being brainwashed by advertising to fill my life with unnecessary stuff. True, I may not be willing to injure a fellow shopper for a flat screen TV, but I have certainly bought items in the belief that they would make my life better.

The reason why our demand for clothing has increased is arguably due to fast fashion. Back in the fifties, designers used to release new collections four times a year, while nowadays new clothing is released into shops every single week. This system is designed to make us feel constantly out of fashion, so that we scurry out and purchase yet another garment – but as a result, fabrics have declined in quality and prices have dropped, as retailers compete to sell the cheapest clothing.

This brings us to a further issue with fast fashion: labourers have to pay the cost. In the documentary *The True Cost* (2015), it was reported that 97 per cent of the clothing sold in the US is produced elsewhere, largely in developing countries. Wages are appallingly low, hours are long and conditions are unsafe for workers. The charity *War on Want* reports that, “the majority of garment workers in Bangladesh earn little more than the minimum wage, set at 3000 taka a month (approximately £25), far below what is considered a living wage”.

It is not possible to fully express the detrimental impact of fast fashion within the space of a single article; nor is it any easier to suggest how to unlearn this cultural drive to buy and accumulate more stuff. But through minimalism, I hope to provide an outline for what a more purposeful, simplistic approach to dressing could look like.

The first step towards creating a minimalist wardrobe is decluttering. Take each item from your wardrobe and ask yourself – do I truly love this garment? Have I worn it in the last six months? Does it fit me properly? If not, donate or sell it. Secondly, focus on building a wardrobe around items that are marked out by timeless appeal. For some, this might mean making a capsule wardrobe consisting of very few pieces. Just look to websites such as *Project 333*, a minimalist challenge that requires participants to wear no more than 33 items of clothing, footwear, and accessories for three months.

One of my biggest qualms with minimalism was that my wardrobe would descend into the realms of the bland and boring, because when you own fewer clothes they have to coordinate, which is usually associated with a neutral colour palette and practical fabrics. I like plain clothes, but usually only when paired with bolder, more outlandish items. Surely I am not the only aspiring minimalist struggling with my inner maximalist?

Personally, I have found a happy medium from maintaining a relatively small wardrobe, decluttering every few months, selling unwanted items and buying second hand. I cannot claim to be an expert, and know that as much as I attempt to minimise I will always be in conflict with the ‘more is more’ voice in my head. But it is a start. Ultimately, the fashion world will be forced to embrace minimalism, as the real threats of climate change and depleting natural resources will necessitate reduced consumption. Until then, we might as well get some practice in.



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