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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Saturday/Sunday, December 14 - 15, 2019 | **D1**

Baby Benz
Very good things
come in this
small Mercedes
package
D13



The Rise of HAPPY-MEDIUM Décor



Extreme: Minimalism



Just Right!



Extreme: Maximalism



MIDPOINT OF DISTINCTION From left: Menu Harbour Lounge Chair by Norm Architects, from \$2,600, [store.menudesignshop.com](#); Tuxedo Chair in Ivory Lellani by the Inside x SF Girl By Bay, \$599, [theinside.com](#); Maison Gerard Jules Leleu Art Deco Armchair (1948), \$14,000, [maison Gerard.com](#). All cats are highly trained, professional models and not for sale.

IMAGINE THAT GOLDBLOCKS wasn't living the fairy tale anymore. That, as a grown woman, she'd moved into her own condo and attempted to decorate it, but nothing was quite right. The ornateness of maximalist design looked bewitching on Instagram but seemed cloying in real life—too vibrant, too hoarder-y. Yet minimalism felt as cold as hours-old porridge, giving her abode the cheerless quality of a dentist's waiting room. It wasn't until she discovered a happy medium—halfway between the two—that she felt anything close to “home.”

Ms. Locks's famous hunger for appetizing moderation might be a fable, but the quest for just-right interior design is very real. About five years ago, maximalism burst onto the scene, a reaction to the notion that the only routes to chic were a complete disavowal of ornament; or the wan offerings of Restoration Hardware (RH) and Pottery Barn; or a trite midcentury-modern look. Maximalism's orgy of pattern, color and objets, and its acres of energetic textiles and wallpaper, were like fresh water to the parched. The snag? “All that drama is a lot to live with day to day,” said Brooklyn designer Doreen Chambers.

Perhaps inevitably, the decorating pendulum has come to rest at what might be called happy-medium design. Pattern appears in measured amounts, colors tend toward palatable pastels, traditionalism shows up in gracefully curved antiques covered with updated textiles or contemporary shapes clad in classic upholstery. Designers welcome idiosyncrasy but not to a chaotic degree.

The look is resonating. “There is a sense of nos-

Simplicity can be too stark.
Over-the-top design can
overwhelm. Good news:
The trend pendulum has settled
at a liveable middle.
Kathryn O'Shea-Evans
explores the new admiration
for modulation

algia in these rooms, but you never feel like you have seen rooms exactly like these before,” said New York designer Gideon Mendelson. Like a good song, they are familiar but not predictable.

In the entryway to her 1920s craftsman home in northern New Jersey, designer Virginia Toledo used paisley, stripes and lattice patterns, all potentially old-fashioned and, in combination, potentially maximalist. The effect, however, is calming and modern for two reasons. First, she restrained the colors to a harmonious palette of brown, tan, pistachio and pale blue (versions of which are found in Benjamin Moore's Color Trends 2020, not coincidentally). Second, the patterns are each expressed in a single color against white rather than in the mashup of hues associated with maximalism.

“Some of our most popular designs are one-color prints,” said Susan Crater, granddaughter of American decorating legend Sister Parish and cur-

rently the president and CEO of Ms. Parish's eponymous textile company. Nearly all the heritage designs in the firm's fall 2019 wallpaper and fabric collection showcase such chromatic restraint. The intricate Cecil Stripe, for instance, was originally designed as a textile in the 1970s in high-contrast black and white. The versions rereleased as grass-cloth wallpaper are equally ornate but significantly more subdued, in pale blue (or taupe) on white or a quiet scheme of tone-on-tone chocolate. “They are easy to use and youthful,” noted Ms. Crater.

When Matthew Patrick Smyth set out to create a line of rugs for Patterson Flynn Martin, his goal, too, was the sort of vital-but-soothing livability associated with happy-medium design. Applying similarly “reassuring colors” in his New Classics collection, the New York designer ensured that the carpets would align with a wide range of décors by including a hint of historicism: For the hand-hooked rugs, he drew inspiration from late-18th- and early-19th-century iron work he sketched while in Dublin, but Mr. Smyth stripped the flourishes from the designs he found in gates and bridges. “It's a simplification, I wanted to get it down to simple graphics,” he said.

Another popular way to achieve happy-mediumism? Restoring vintage seating with plain modern upholstery that tempers its fussiness. But new-furniture designers are also finding comfy compromises between extremes. The boxy new Tuxedo chair from the Inside, a digitally native company, has minimalist lines but can be upholstered in acceptably antic traditional patterns like Lellani,

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Inside



IT BAGS

Status luggage has usurped rare sneakers' role as the hyped must-have **D3**



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Five cheeses are better than one in this gooiily endearing pasta recipe **D10**



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AFTER THE FALLOUT

Visiting unflappable locals in Chernobyl—now an unlikely tourist destination **D8**

DESIGN & DECORATING



SOUTHERN COMFORT For a Lake Charles, La., home, designer Carter Kay staged a camel-back sofa, a pillow of antique Aubusson tapestry, a Queen Anne huntboard and a chinoiserie and serapi rug against a quiet, anti-maximalist background of plain cream walls.

Mildly Wild

Continued from page D1 which features grey-green medallion motifs (see the middle chair on D1). “It’s a tile pattern with a classic repeat that reads as both a floral and geometric,” said co-founder and CEO Christiane Lemieux.

Richmond, Va., designer Sara Hillery pointed to the semi-scrolled arms of Hickory Chair’s Albert sofa as an another example. “Track arms have been super popular in recent years,” she said, referring to the upholstered squares that form the sides and arms of many contemporary couches, “but people and furniture makers are now veering toward softer more artful curves.” Los Angeles designer Betsy Burnham noted a resurgence in “classic English up-

a mossy green velvet that feels contemporary. Continuing the theme and the mild rejection of “less is more,” against the wall one can see an English huntboard with cabriole legs—a signature feature of the Queen Anne style.

Design pros urge homeowners not to invest too heavily in sentiment, however, lest your décor skew too “granny chic,” a style embraced by a faction of mid-20 to late-30-somethings that House Beautiful recently christened “grandmillennials.” “It’s not the full-on Victorian lace and overblown femininity,” said New York designer Young Huh of happy-mediumism. “It’s done judiciously so it feels fresher.” To inject the Lake Charles living room with what she called a necessary bolt of “now,” Ms. Kay hung an unframed mixed-media bayou landscape by John Folsom over that British sideboard.

Though maximalism might have ultimately proved too rich for the blood of many Americans, designers remain grateful for its influence. Without it, we’d never have arrived at this satisfying stylistic equilibrium, noted John Loecke, co-founder of design firm Madcap Cottage, in High Point, N.C. “Our clients are willing to go to that medium place where they have a pattern on their sofa and in wallpaper because they’ve seen highly publicized maximalist spaces like Annabel’s,” he said, referencing Martin Brudnizki’s fanciful, exuberant redesign of the London social club. “Maximalism has changed the conversation.”

We couldn’t have arrived here without maximalism.

holstery—tufted chairs and Chesterfield sofas—and we’re mixing these pieces with super-modern light fixtures and graphic area rugs.”

This taste for the familiar extends to a style of brown furniture that hasn’t been hip for half a century: Queen Anne. For a living room in a Lake Charles, La., home, Atlanta designer Carter Kay covered a pair of chunky sofas that feature Queen Anne-ish camelbacks and flared arms in



UNRUFFLED URBANITY In the entry of this 1920s home, paisley walls and a cabriole-legged bench might skew “granny,” but designer Virginia Toledo of Toledo Geller, in Englewood, N.J., cut the preciousness with a glossy black banister, neutral geometric rug and a pointedly simple glass-orb light.



COLOR ME CALM A judicious smattering of pattern combined with a tight palette of pale blues, grey greens, oatmeal and brown lend an effortlessness to the scheme of this Millbrook, N.Y., living room by Hendricks Churchill. The easy-on-the-eyes pastels also unify a midcentury modern floor lamp and chair, a boxy new sofa and Moroccan flatwoven rug, all set within a circa-1800 envelope.

NEITHER PLAIN NOR PAINFULLY ORNATE / FIVE EASY PIECES THAT EXEMPLIFY THE LOOK OF HAPPY-MEDIUM DESIGN



From left: Currey & Company Hopper Floor Lamp, \$1,490, [shopcandelabra.com](#); Albert Sofa by Albert Sack, from \$5,692, [hickorychair.com](#); Cecil Stripe Wallpaper, \$168 per yard, [sisterparishdesign.com](#); Antique Cane and Wood Side or End Table, \$1,850, [1stdibs.com](#); Aiden Carpet by Matthew Patrick Smyth (sample shown), \$90 per square foot, [pattersonflynnmartin.com](#)

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