

DESIGNER'S CORNER

Designing a Minimalist Space That Still Feels Warm

Here's how to make your living room feel chic, clean and inviting, too

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Creamy [MICHAEL CLIFFORD](#) lend depth to a space designed by Jake Arnold.
MICHAEL CLIFFORD



Each week, Mansion Global tackles a topic with an elite group of designers from around the world who work on luxury properties. This week, we look at how to create a living room that is minimalist, but warm at the same time.

For many, minimalism celebrates the beauty of less and brings a sense of peace to a space.

“A minimalist design, free of clutter and excess, can evoke a feeling of lightness and mental clarity,” said Chandler Oldham, interior design director at DXA Studio in New York. “It can also make a space appear larger and more expansive.”

While the look might have a sterile reputation, with the right styling, it can still be warm. We talked to top design pros for their top tips for creating a room that may be minimal, but still big on personality.

Curate and Edit

“Everything is about silhouettes. You have to have a grounding piece in the room and make sure scale is appropriate and proportionate. To create the look, pick one large piece that has function and then only focus on what is truly needed to make the space usable. Then add balance by incorporating texture without too many layers.

“Make sure the materials and the textiles used are plush and warm and have an element of richness through the texture and the color palette. Stay away from cooler tones and use warmer accents in mohairs and boucles.”

— **Jake Arnold, principal designer of Studio Jake Arnold in Los Angeles**

Find Balance

“Everything has to flow and find its place—no piece should be placed by chance. Hunt for those truly extraordinary, one-of-a-kind pieces you find in galleries. The works can be antique, modern or contemporary. I like to mix vintage and contemporary design as it really warms up a place. Vintage pieces bring a soul to the room.

“I recommend a neutral color palette. Using neutral tones gives the sense that there is more light filling the room and really allows the furniture to stand out, even without much natural light.

“The proportions are very important, so working on a floor plan is extremely crucial. Create an appropriate amount of breathing room in a space, so there is a balanced sense of space between the furniture and works of art.”



Designed by Emma Donnersberg, a minimalist living room feels warm and interesting due to art, light fixtures and texture.

Stefan Julliard

— Emma Donnersberg, Paris-based interior designer

Add a Textural Touch

“Minimal design lends itself to a more expansive and airier feel. It can also help a smaller space feel larger. When it’s done well, I find these spaces liberating.

“Think quality over quantity. Because each piece will be in focus, it’s important that you love every item you add. They must work well together, and you need to be strategic in your layout.

“Texture creates depth and warmth, even if you’re using a neutral palette. With all design, considering the foundation of the home's style is the starting point. If the architecture of the home is more modern and clean lined, think of adding one or two pieces that feel more organic and detailed in design. The opposite is true if your home’s structure is full of character; bring in a few clean-lined pieces.

“Minimalism does not mean boring. Perhaps adding a textured wallpaper will bring in a bit more depth than paint. Or select hardwood flooring that has a bit more natural grain to add a needed organic element.”



In a space designed by Jennifer Hallock, white on white looks warm because of tactile touches.

Courtesy of Jennifer Hallock

— Interior designer Jennifer Hallock of Jennifer Hallock Designs in Los Angeles

Consider Every Element

“You can’t hide as much with minimalism. Your walls have to look impeccable—even if there’s no art, ensure there’s fresh, clean paint. If there’s less to look at, you’ll see more imperfections.

“Use a textured rug or cozy fabrics, such as velvet. You can have a minimalist palette with different textures in the same color. Think winter whites or creamy beiges.

“Make sure all of the pieces are super comfortable and cleanable. A large, sculptural coffee table that can function in multiple ways is essential with less supporting furniture.

“I would recommend a natural floor, like wood, since it’s the warmest, paired with an area carpet. Poured concrete is the quintessential flooring for a minimalist environment.”



In a clean space designed by Holly Waterfield, built-ins and artwork keep things interesting.

Matthew Williams

— **Holly Waterfield, principal interior designer at The Brooklyn Home Company based in Brookly**

Look to Layering

“Good lighting is critical to creating a beautiful minimal design. It is important to design the lighting to layer in both indirect and direct lighting.

“[One] way of giving a minimal design a lived-in feel is the integration of warm wood accents in the furnishings and of course the addition of plants. We also incorporate a feature fireplace with a natural stone mantel as a way of grounding a space and creating a place to congregate around warmth and firelight.

“Organic materials with elegant and simple detailing can enhance a space without becoming overwhelming, as well as a layering of textures to bring out the inherent beauty in raw materials. We gravitate to naturally occurring materials with matte finishes or stones with cleft-like finishes to soften the palette and feel more inviting than highly polished surfaces.”

“Balance is a key for selecting your material palette. If the wood flooring is a mid-tone, the furniture can be a darker or lighter tone to serve as a counterpoint to the flooring, avoiding too much uniformity or the reverse, too many contrasting tones, which make the space feel busy. Materials can also complement their surroundings, such as a warm wood wall finish with a cool concrete flooring. This juxtaposition of materials creates a sensibility in the space, where no single element overwhelms the design.”



Designer Chandler Oldham added interest to a clean-lined living space with woodwork and accents.
Ari Burling

— Chandler Oldham, interior design director at New York-based DXA Studio