

# HOME IS WHERE THE ZEN IS

Dubai-based interiors designers Monica Arango and Tatiana Jaramillio tell **Shreeja Ravindranathan** how the top interior trends can also turn your home in to a stylish haven of wellbeing

**T**here is no place like home. Especially at the end of a long, hard, day when you need to get away from it all. But what really makes a home your sanctuary from the urban tech-ridden lives we lead? Your house could boast style and elegance to rival showroom displays and magazine photoshoots but what truly counts is the sense of contentment it can provide. Do designer rugs and on-trend ultraviolet walls mean much if they don't make the people within happy?

The self-reflection and hunt for wholesomeness that has largely characterised our fitness and eating trends as a response to a tumultuous world in transition have now seeped into interiors too. 'Self-care is leading 2018 interiors trend,' say Dubai-based Columbian interior designers Tatiana Jaramillio and Monica Durou who founded home-grown interior design firm C'est Ici. Our clients' favourite demand is to feel relaxed when they arrive home and have practical, multifunctional designs. 'The culture of 'slow movement' has been encouraging people to live in the moment and experience the spaces they're in and will continue to do so in 2019.'

Online platform Pinterest, that sees users save images of ideas, concepts and things they like agrees: it has had 248 per cent increase in users saving images of interiors that promote mindfulness.

Luckily, some of the other top interiors trends of 2018 also focus on wellbeing and mindfulness, which he means your home will not just keep up with the Joneses, but it will also be a reflection and collection of who you are and what you love.



Monica Durou (left), and Tatiana Jaramillio (right) and founders of interior design firm C'est Ici.



Incorporate natural elements such as wood, stone, marble and rattan into your decor



**T**he materials we use in our interiors can greatly reduce the stress we bring home from the material world. Think of the last time you truly relaxed and you're probably dredging up blissful memories of a beach vacation, where the waves lapped your feet and sand slipped through your toes. Or a mountain sanctuary, where the pine-scented wind and mild sunlight caress your face.

This inherent connection we feel to nature as human beings called Biophilia, is one of the driving forces behind 2018's décor and interior trends in the form of Biophilic design – a design principle that brings the outdoors indoors by infusing organic, tactile elements such as grained wood, stone, marble, slate, rattan and jute into architecture and interiors. Numerous studies conducted in Scandinavian countries like Finland, Norway and Sweden – some of the world's happiest nations that gifted the world with the Scandi-chic style where wood is the hero – have proven that wooden dwellings come with physiological benefits of reduced heart rates and stress level and has the rejuvenating effect of a walk in the woods. According to research conducted by Linköping university in Sweden, wood is blessed with acoustic features that allow it to absorb sound and create a harmonious, tranquil environment.

Stone is another step to inculcating a sense of serenity at home. The natural element's presence in living spaces introduces a sense of grounded-ness, of being rooted to the earth, and a sense of stability according to Feng Shui principles. It's why spas and hotel bathrooms go all out with marble furnishings and stone-finish countertops.

You don't have to rip out your floorings or remodel your kitchen from scratch with all-marble countertops. 'Wood and stone are materials that are versatile and create a soothing environment,' say Tatiana and Monica, and this versatility means you can infuse them into rooms without breaking the bank, in the form of vases with a marble finish or granite plant pots and wicker ceiling lamps or wooden venetian blinds. 'Given the weather and light in Dubai, pale woods and light stone colours create a soothing environment,' Monica and Tatiana point out.

You can also use light wood-lookalike in vinyl, which gives the same effect and is easier on the pocket'. Weave sleek, minimalist wicker and cane furniture with classic furniture advice Monica and Tatiana. Today's rattan furniture no longer looks like leftovers from your grandma's seventies living room.

If you're feeling brave, invest in a marble-topped coffee table as a statement piece, but ensure your purchase is in green, the trending colour for marble – it signifies feeling at one with nature, and blends seamlessly into its surroundings as it is neither as moody as black or clinical as white marble.



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ÇARAPOL PAINTS



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**P**astel hues have been ruling the roost for the first half of 2018 with pale yellows, blush pink, baby blues and soothing greens and lavenders vying for attention and replacing mind-numbing go-to neutrals like beiges and off-whites. However, the colour that has come up trumps is Sage – a muted shade of light green that can be used to paint cabinets, walls and even looks great as bathroom fittings and backsplash. It's a gradient less cheery than its cousin mint, but that subtle gravitas, a sagacity if you will, is what's making people swoon over the colour. It's also versatile – Sage's chalky, grey-toned finish blends with modern and minimalist décor, while adding just that barely-there pop of colour to highlight pale wood furniture or indoor plants.

'Along with Sage, the other shades of green that have been finding a fandom are celery and avocado green,' say Monica and Tatiana. The former is a refreshing light green and the latter skids towards the earthier olive green on the

Soothing palettes such as earthy terracotta and shades of green like Sage help maintain a calm ambience



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colour spectrum but is brighter and offers more verve without washing out rooms to look like hospital wards. Green's inherently tranquil and healing attributes and connotations of renewal and life make these shades ideal to calm down and spruce up your home – a Minnesota State University study from 2003 found green-coloured environments reduce stress.

However, if you favour warmer, bold colours, you're in luck – earthier colours like terracotta and russet red that Tatiana and Monica say are the trending shades for fall. 'Cuisine colours were the biggest trends at the Milan Design Week in April and turmeric and mustard yellow, and papaya orange will be trending.' These are subdued, comforting variants of fiery oranges and reds that are found in nature and won't overpower or put you on edge but add personality and a rustic charm to your home. >

## WABI-SABI

Of 2017's obsession was Hygge, the Danish lifestyle that finds wellbeing and contentment through cosiness, candlelight and community, then 2018 travels all the way to Far East in its quest for well-being landing on the Japanese buzzword of Wabi-Sabi, a minimalist philosophy rooted in Zen Buddhism that seeks beauty in imperfection. Like its European counterpart Hygge, interiors and décor are a large part of Wabi-Sabi – unlike the clean lines of Danish Hygge and Swedish Lagom (more is less), Wabi-Sabi's minimalism celebrates asymmetry and a distressed, lived-in aesthetic that make you more mindful of the process of life, and the knowledge and contentment that only comes with passage of time and age.

The great news is you don't have to wait any longer or grow any older to welcome some Wabi-Sabi into your home. 'Incorporating the Wabi-Sabi aesthetic is completely a style and therefore it isn't for everyone,' Monica and Tatiana caution. 'However, it's easy to incorporate some elements of this style; focus on retaining pieces from the past that have meaning, furniture you treasure since Wabi-Sabi is all about authenticity and truly enjoying and appreciating the little there is.'

'Imperfection is a key element in this style,' the duo reiterates. Achieve it with irregular, asymmetrical ceramic bowls and vases, off-kilter tables fashioned from salvaged wood or driftwood and fabrics that wear wrinkles and creases well, such as linen. Wabi-Sabi also relies heavily on the use of materials found in nature as opposed to manufactured industrial products – so opt for flooring and furniture in dark wood, stick to exposed stone and brick walls, or raw concrete finishes, and use calming shades of grey, green and smoky blues. Handmade pottery and pre-loved items from a flea market top the list too. Plants are another key feature of Wabi-Sabi but think pared-down low-maintenance leafy ferns and single stem flowers (orchids and verbena mixed in with twigs) that can transform into the centre-piece of the rooms that is stark and minimally furnished; space and light are important features of the style. A little confusing?

'It's a spiritual style that isn't definite and translates to a number of styles,' explains Tatiana and Monica.

To put it simply, Wabi-Sabi is a frugal combination of all the wellbeing-focused interiors trends we've discussed so far, but it embodies them in the framework of a rustic, aesthetic mess that leaves your rooms with the incomplete, stark yet poetic feel of a haiku.



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## INDOOR PLANTS

Move over mirrors and artwork, plants are the hottest home accessories of 2018. Type in plantsofinstagram or houseplants into Instagram and your feed will turn into a forest of foliage-filled homes and workspaces – think orchids, leafy monstera plants, ferns and moneyplants. 'Plants bring beauty, character, texture and good energy into every space,' say Monica and Tatiana. 'More importantly, adding greenery is one of the easiest ways to style without investing in crazy amounts of money' – another reason why the indoor jungle fever is catching on.

'Even if you don't have the greenest of thumbs, taking care of real flowers and plants bring a certain meditative quality to your routine as you watch them grow and thrive. They promote a sense of freedom and openness', the duo explain.

Research by NASA has revealed that in just a span of 24 hours, houseplants can remove 80 per cent of toxins from the air and increase oxygen content.

While life in the UAE's urban jungle's high-rise apartment might not grant us all with the luxury of a garden, there are plenty of new ingenious ways to add some foliage into your digs. Potted plants are passe. Monica and Tatiana list some ingenious and extremely Instagramable methods of introducing plants into your décor: 'Try the Jungalow method. No symmetry and rules apply here. Take plants up from ground level and line them up on benches.' Stack your plants as fillers in empty corners and nooks of shelves with some stylish creepers that will artfully cascade over your books and tchotchkes. You can also stack them up on headboards, the duo say: 'When you live in a small space a multifunctional head board is pretty useful. Or fix up a ledge next to your kitchen window and set up your collection of succulents and herbs.'

Geometric prism holders, that can be hung from ceilings or fitted on to walls are also a rage. 'They're a great way to display air plants – low-maintenance that don't require soil and sun and only need to be misted once a week.'



IKEA

Maintaining plants are usually a huge concern, but the good news, say Monica and Tatiana is that 'terrariums (sealed glass globes in which plants can be grown), succulents and cacti (a hot favourite) are the easiest to take care of and require water every 15 days or so only.'

Woven macramé wall hangers, hanging planters and vertical wall gardens are other options.



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