

CAN MINIMALIST LIFESTYLE BE A KEY TO ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY?

Varda Samvedi*
Sarika Singh**

ABSTRACT

The paper emphasizes Minimalism which has evolved into a lifestyle choice, embraced by many not only for its visual allure but also for its profound impact on daily life. Central to minimalism is the promotion of mindfulness in the allocation of possessions, time, finances, and energy. Often mistaken for starkness, minimalism prioritizes quality over quantity, focusing on essentials rather than excess. Rooted in post-World War II reactions to overwhelming artistic expressions, minimalism draws inspiration from Japanese aesthetics and the Modernist movement, exemplified by figures like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. By curbing consumerism and embracing simplicity, minimalism not only enhances personal well-being but also aligns with broader environmental sustainability goals. Through conscious consumption and mindful living, minimalism emerges as a pathway to a more balanced, fulfilling existence.

Keywords: *Minimalist, Lifestyle, Sustainability.*

Introduction

The research on how minimalism can aid in attaining sustainability is the main objective of this essay. For this reason, I start by going into more detail about minimalism and then move on to sustainability. I'll look at four case studies that were constructed with various minimalist goals in mind: two from an aesthetic standpoint and two that took sustainability into account. My research introduces me to eco-minimalism, a sustainable approach to building that incorporates conventional methods. The most popular approach to living sustainably is to make the most of the natural environment.

"Minimalism is more than just a form of aesthetic or art period. It is all about creating a philosophy—an emotion, experience, or putting forward an insight."

People are increasingly choosing to embrace minimalism as a way of life rather than just a decorative aesthetic, making it one of the hottest trends in magazines and homes. The biggest trend of 2019 is minimalism, according to 46% of British adults surveyed; this trend outpaces all others, including maximalism and tropical style.

Being minimalistic means being extremely conscious of and prudent with how one uses their belongings, time, money, and energy. Sometimes people misidentify it as a minimalist movement that is "marked by extreme scarceness of design elements." While the minimalist design approach serves as the foundation for the characteristics of the minimalist lifestyle, the former is not always implied by the latter. "Less is more" is still the guiding principle of minimalism, suggesting that quality should come before quantity. Therefore, the definition of minimalism is the regular use of the fewest, most necessary items rather than a lack of possessions. By choosing such a lifestyle, one chooses to be conscious of the things that one needs or desires, and how these things affect oneself (in fact, one must know the difference between need and desire).

* Research Scholar, School of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Nirwan University Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

** Professor & Dean, School of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Nirwan University Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

After World War II, in the 1950s and 1960s, abstract expressionism was widely popular, and this is when minimalism emerged. It was a response to the overwhelming expressions that people were seeing everywhere. The minimalists avoided the conspicuous aspects of abstract expressionism in favor of sleeker, more geometric pieces with simpler elements that deliberately lacked "classical" aesthetic appeal. Most people agree that Western Modernism and Japanese aesthetics are responsible for the development of minimalism in design. Director of the Bauhaus School of Art and Design Ludwig Mies van Rohe's work exemplifies the style. It is a well-known fact that Mies is the one who first said, "Less is more." People who are seeking stability and peace frequently adopt it. A calm, organized, and peaceful atmosphere is inherently created by minimalist design, which allows one to unwind from the stress of a busy world.

The simple aesthetics of modern art have an influence on the concept of minimalism. Despite being created in 1929, the term gained popularity in the art world during the 1960s and 1970s when more emphasis was placed on form purity than on the more expressive gesturalism of artists such as Van Gogh. The serenity it exuded led to the incorporation of minimalist ideas into architecture and interior design, which ultimately became a way of life.

Why Adopt Minimalism?

The simple aesthetics of modern art have an influence on the concept of minimalism. Despite being created in 1929, the term gained popularity in the art world during the 1960s and 1970s when more emphasis was placed on form purity than on the more expressive gesturalism of artists such as Van Gogh. The serenity it exuded led to the incorporation of minimalist ideas into architecture and interior design, which ultimately became a way of life. People have finally realized that there is more to life than owning high-priced cars or accumulating a mountain of cheap clothing that they hardly ever wear after years of leading fast lives and feeling the need to earn money for a better standard of living. Nowadays, a growing number of people are turning away from materialism in order to enjoy the important things in life. They can then use that money and time to support social causes, their family and other important relationships, or other sources of truly fulfilling happiness.

For example, minimalism may make it possible to travel freely. One's ability to travel and explore is limited when working a typical 9–5 job. People want to experience the diversity of the world and are aware of it because of the internet, but they rarely have time in their busy schedules to do so. A lot of people are tired of squandering time every day in an attempt to improve tomorrow. Seventy-two percent of people prefer to spend money on travel over purchases, according to a Harris Group and Event rite study. Many times, the pressures and stress of fast-paced corporate work push people toward a less financially rewarding but more flexible career path so they can use their money for travel instead of material possessions. People's lives are made more valuable and happy by the quality time that minimalism allows them to spend, whether it is alone or with loved ones.

Additionally, minimalism's frugal use of resources could greatly benefit the environment. People are becoming more aware of the environment and how important it is to do our part to protect our resources for future generations as well as for ourselves. Living a minimalist lifestyle can improve the world and give one's life more purpose.

In summary, individuals are becoming more careful with money in order to make better use of their time and finances.

The simple aesthetics of modern art also have an impact on the concept of minimalism. Despite being created in 1929, the term gained popularity in the art world during the 1960s and 1970s when more emphasis was placed on form purity than on the more expressive gesturalism of artists such as Van Gogh. The serenity it exuded led to the incorporation of minimalist ideas into architecture and interior design, which ultimately became a way of life.

Why Minimalist Approach

Each has a different minimalist approach depending on their circumstances, including their work, family size, income level, and so forth. Not everyone is able to lead a similar life. True, minimalism is about having fewer possessions, but it need not entail living a life devoid of color or having a tiny home. Only items that add value and improve one's life should be owned by individuals. If it includes a flower vase, be it but including many vases without any use doesn't add up to a minimalist approach. It can be helpful to stop purchasing all those disposable IKEA items that must be thrown away or replaced quickly in favor of one high-quality item that will last a long time. Minimalism is a kind of strategy that aims to reduce clutter so that we can concentrate on the things that truly count.

Reduced consumption of goods has a significant positive environmental impact. Reducing your consumption will help you use less, which will reduce waste. The last few years have seen a minor shift in society. More people are becoming aware of the consequences of consumerism and becoming conscious buyers. Throughout the past year, minimalism has become more popular. The "Tidying up with Marie Kondo" television series has helped minimalism gain more and more traction. Her approach to organizing and decluttering has improved people's lives and taught them to keep only the most priceless items—in her words, only keep things that "spark joy"—in their possession. Fewer possessions have been linked to stress relief and increased happiness.

When talking about minimalism people have plenty of misconceptions about the way of living like a minimalist. "You can't have a family, a job, a good-sized house, live sanely, own a capsule wardrobe, and have no attachments. You have to live with less than 100 possessions. For aesthetic purposes, two or three pieces of furniture, an empty room devoid of any décor, and a white-on-white backdrop are ideal. Tiny homes are becoming the Shangri-La of minimalism, according to popular belief.

Comfort actually exists in a state of perfect clarity, where everything in the room is inconspicuous and the eyes, mind, body, and other senses are at ease. Achieving a sustainable lifestyle and adhering to minimalism requires careful consideration of proportions, value, the use of natural light, materials, finishes, and connections to the outdoors.

How to Achieve it?

Simplicity and having less stuff are key components of minimalism. The purportedly clean and clutter-free minimalist spaces are made up of only the most necessary items. When purchasing anything for the house, it's crucial to use reason and calculation in order to implement minimalism. These materials have multiple uses, which allows them to fill more needs while taking up less room. To keep the space tidy and fresh, the paint colors selected for the walls should be coordinated with neutral color schemes like white, grey, and earthy tones. The room appears bigger thanks to these colors as well. The introduction of peace into one's life is a key goal of becoming a minimalist. Putting an emphasis on functional, reasonably sized furniture that complements the space's intended occupancy while maintaining a clean aesthetic. A clutter-free interior space can be created by decorating with fewer, more valuable items rather than a lot of little ones, like an oriental rug or chandelier.

Provided the facts about Minimalism the questions remain:

- What does sustainability mean?
- What connects Minimalism with Sustainability?
- Is the minimalist design helpful for creating a sustainable environment?

What does Sustainability Mean?

The ability to meet current needs without sacrificing resources for the needs of future generations is referred to as sustainability. Economic, Environmental, and Social are the three fundamental pillars upon which this concept is built; it can also be understood as Profit, Planet, and People, in that order. The concept of sustainability gained popularity as a reaction to the depletion of natural resources and long-term harm done to the planet in the pursuit of short-term, profit-driven objectives. One of the main factors contributing to the depletion of natural resources is consumerism and overconsumption. As far as our vision is concerned, consumerism is promoting a system where there is an invitation to spend more and own more through the use of billboards, shopping centers, and advertisements. The idea that a person's level of happiness or satisfaction is directly correlated with their consumption of goods is promoted by consumerism. Demand growth requires higher production, which raises the emission of waste, pollution, and deforestation. The main issue, it seems, is that people are unaware of the impact their consumption has on the environment and, worse, choose to ignore it in order to conform to social norms. "The truth is that if we want to live within ecological limits, we would need to return to a lifestyle similar to the one we had in the 1970s before consumption levels went crazy in the 1980s," writes acclaimed author, social activist, and filmmaker Naomi Klein in her book "This changes everything."

If we look back to the traditional Indian Bungalow, Shaker culture, or Japanese Zen architecture, we can find an ideal way of living minimally and in harmony with nature. Plainly detailed furniture and linear designs embrace the simplicity of interiors, green outdoors, and windows to allow access to natural air and sunlight to give an almost meditative experience. There is a sense of sufficiency with the blend of nature and private space. Feeling wholesome will keep you away from distractions and the urge to buy newer trendy furniture. Therefore, the space remains clutter-free and minimal.

The inspiration for minimalism is drawn from Shakers combined with the modernist movement for more simplified and calming ways. For a long time, Chinese and Japanese have used the concept of *ma*, or the space and balance between objects and philosophies of Zen Buddhism while Indians follow *Vastu Shastra* for building homes to encompass the positive energy and sanity in their homes. All the given traditional methods make great use of the environment and logical architectural techniques to stay sustainable.

Due to the running trend of minimalism and increased compassion for sustainability in people, a method called Eco-minimalism is becoming popular these days. Eco-minimalism is a cost-effective and simple solution for promoting ecological balance. It emphasizes the passive approach rather than the active approach of making buildings, similar to the traditional techniques of building. The passive approach is a way of making nature react to the buildings such as insulation, draught-proofing, and the use of healthy local materials instead of slapping solar panels on the roof. Careful planning and implementation of design structures can even eliminate the use of any green technology. Solutions like insulation, lowering electrical loads, double glazing, structural air tightness, and placing new construction to maximize solar gain and minimize heat loss were developed by Howard Liddell and Nick Grant. They defined three key rules of eco-minimalism-

- Opposition of unnecessary technology
- Committing to economic and environmental goals
- Obligating to common sense pinning down the overestimated modern scientific thinking

What Connects Minimalism and Sustainability

The term eco minimalism was coined by Howard Liddell, a British architect who initiated sustainable and energy-efficient building methods. It was first discussed in a green construction project to raise awareness in builders about the impact of the building process and take measures.

Eco-minimalism is a blend of eco-friendly and minimalist lifestyles as both environmentalism and minimalism follow similar principles. Consuming fewer things is one of the most effective ways to cut down the footprint.

Although there is a slight clash between environmental principles and minimalism, this is where eco-minimalism paves its path.

For better understanding, let's take a situation.

A minimalist decides to declutter, while decluttering he/she will throw everything in excess for example pens. A minimalist will keep only as many as he/she needs and throw away or donate the rest. But an eco-minimalist in a similar situation will make use of every last bit of it. Donations are noble, but it isn't always used by someone or resold so the best thing to be done is to use them before all of those pens go to waste. This is a very eco-friendly choice but not totally minimal.

- Eco-minimalism can be segregated into these three categories
- Design Approach
- Personal virtue
- Lifestyle

An eco-minimalist design approach is adapting simpler methods of construction building and reducing the environmental effect. This may include, using simpler techniques and tools rather than heavy energy-consuming machinery, using environmentally friendly/ local materials, or creating a basic structure. A building doesn't have to be specifically minimalist to be eco-minimal.

Adapting minimalism along with taking environment-friendly steps allows us to be sustainable effortlessly.

Case Studies

- **Will Andreson's Eco-Minimalist Home**

This eco-minimalist house in Clapham, South London, was designed by Will Andreson in 2004. The project is a zero-carbon house, as demonstrated by a six-year analysis. Huge windows installed by Andreson provide the top-floor living room with an abundance of natural light. Solar panels cover the roof, and standard wooden planks cover the floor. (Fig:1) The use of wooden planks keeps the house warm and it lasts for a very long time. Wooden floors are thus economical and environment-friendly to maintain or repair compared to carpets or stone. It is also ecological to process rather than cutting down the

mountains of stone. Maximum sunlight also reduces the need to use lights, and heaters while big windows allow access to maximum air in summer. Air barriers allow moisture to escape while keeping heat from being lost. (Fig:2) As a result, less electric heating is required. In addition to having extremely insulated walls, a floor, and a roof, the house is airtight and has ventilation provided by air barriers. (Fig:2)

- **Upside-Down House**

The Upside-Down House was created by the Melbourne-based Australian architectural firm "In between Architecture." This is a result of its strange layout, which places the living area on the first floor and the bedrooms on the ground floor. Typically, the living area is located at the entry, with the bedrooms upstairs. Here, on the ground floor, however, bedrooms encircle you, and a staircase leads to the living area. Due to its 1970s double brick construction, the house is incredibly robust and environmentally friendly, but it is also incredibly dark and artistic. The redesign prioritized increasing natural light, expanding space, and improving energy efficiency because the clients requested more daylight and family-friendly space. Choosing to build around the existing structure instead of demolishing the sturdy walls was the architects' decision. To achieve this, the architect inverted the design to maximize the amount of natural light and airflow. A feeling of the natural world is provided by the living area's opening to the backyard. (Fig:3)

Not taking down the building was an eco-friendly choice by avoiding a lot of energy usage, waste dumping, and transportation. Again, more sunlight means less use of electricity. The interior of the home is open-concept and minimalist with subtle aesthetics. (Fig:4) Lesser consumption minimizes cost and footprint.

There are now features that save energy.

It already saves a great deal of energy and resources to leave the current walls in place. Opening up your home to natural light and ventilation can help you use less energy overall. However, the home has numerous sustainable energy supply options. The house has a value that means it doesn't need to be updated to fit in with fads because of its timeless interior design and obvious aesthetics.

Every day, without fail, the house feels renewed thanks to its connection to the outside environment.

- **John Pawson's Own Minimalist Rural Retreat**

British designer John Pawson is well-known for his incredibly straightforward and minimalistic designs. He has been an architect for more than thirty years, and his designs are distinctive and original. John Pawson transformed a rural farming complex into his personal getaway residence. (Fig:5) There are three clutter-free kitchens in the house. A large tract of land has a few buildings, including a barn with a cottage, stables, and a farmhouse. He had a room as large as forty-five meters when the barn and farmhouse were joined. The pond and orchard are not far from the kitchen located at the end of the barn.

According to Pawson, the room is large enough to hold his large family while maintaining an open appearance. He used what was readily available locally, which is essentially a modern take on concrete. They used concrete to cover the flooring as well. Rather than painting the walls, lime plaster was used to cover them as well as the ceiling. (Fig:6) It is not only incredibly practical but also gives off a minimalist, natural look.

Locally sourced material is one of the most significant ways of constructing an eco-minimalist building. The use of limestone instead of paint also benefits the environment. Paint consists of harmful ozone formation and other chemicals. The CO₂ emitted due to manufacturing paint is one of the key contributors to negative environmental impact.

John Pawson's retreat house is an excellent illustration of minimalist architecture and design. The building's introduction of simplicity can be attributed to the architect's preference for minimalist design. It is an opulent take on minimalism that nevertheless indirectly benefits the environment. Pawson has done away with transportation by employing locally produced materials. Paint releases petroleum solvent even after it dries, so using limestone plaster is also a very environmentally friendly choice. Such extravagant, minimalist interior design has the potential to spread beyond the wealthy segments of society and attract a wider audience.

- **RieraHouse, Sant Andreu De Llavaneres, Barcelona, Spain.**

One of Javier Barba's first designs for BC Estudio Architects is this home. Constructing this house with an underground structure's natural cooling and insulation qualities was a challenge. In

addition, the house ought to have an open feel and embrace the outside environment. A busy road is situated above the steeply sloping house, which is partially hidden from view. In order to reduce the visual impact on the landscape, the roof blends in with the hills' natural appearance.(Fig:7)

It uses both natural soundproofing and thermal insulation at the same time. The entrance resembles the entrance of a cave and leads to the main hall, which has a courtyard at the end and windows and a door that lets light stream in. (Fig:8) The house is oriented towards the south to allow for optimal natural light and air circulation within. These elements make a significant contribution to energy conservation. The house has a serene view of the Mediterranean coast and is made of concrete with a green roof (fig. 7). The arched walls of the living room are a clever way to break up the building's overall pattern of straight lines. The architect has made excellent use of the ground's thermal mass to keep the house cool during the summer and double-glazed every window to offer shade from the sun through shutters. The house was unquestionably chosen as one of the world's most sustainable homes by the George Wright Forum and the European Commission for the Project Monitor Program in 1989.

Analysis

The four case studies are designed by independent designers and architects and are located in distinct locations. Case Studies 2 and 3 aim to create visually appealing environments, whereas Case Studies 1 and 4 intentionally construct a sustainable living space. The old, highly insulated double brick walls from the 1970s have been preserved in the upside-down house (2), saving a significant amount of construction. Not only that, but it also saves money and material resources, transportation needed for dumping, and waste generated during the wall-tearing process. Large windows and an open living space reduce the need for excessive electricity use. The house has a minimalistic appearance and is devoid of excess furniture. Solar panels and energy-efficient lighting have also been added. In a similar vein, John Pawson's house (3) has been designed with a minimalist aesthetic, making it visually appealing. The area is quite open, pollution-free, and environmentally friendly thanks to the orchard, pond, and bustle of daily life. Instead of using paint, he used lime plaster and materials that were readily available locally. Paint is one of the top five environmental hazards, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency. Even after they have dried, paints have the potential to release petroleum solvents, also known as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), into the air, which can cause indoor air pollution. The space is quite serene because of its minimalistic design and sparse furniture.

The eco-minimalism building principles are applied in Will Andreson's (1) sustainable home. The roof has large windows to let in natural light and fresh air, in addition to being covered in solar panels. The pond's ability to collect rainwater is one unique feature. Air barriers are in place to stop heat loss. Because of its hilltop location, Riera House (4) benefits from a natural cooling effect. It has a large living area that faces the sun for optimal sunlight and insulated walls for soundproofing and heat retention, just like every other house.

Conclusion

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

Albert Einstein

The quotation argues that developing new technologies and products won't be helpful in solving the problems of today, which are caused by technology and ever-increasing consumerism.

Combining eco-minimalist building methods with a historical retreat, as recommended by Naomi Klein, maybe the solution to a minimalist lifestyle. In the past, people only purchased furniture, a small amount of dishware, and a few pairs of clothes. Together with living in harmony with the natural world, they followed the eco-minimalism architectural principles. Our forefathers penned these principles over many years and centuries. As technology advanced, they refined their most logical and empirically supported method, which we abandoned. Most people find taking a step back frightening because it implies sacrificing their standards and comfort. Living a minimalist lifestyle is about living simply, having more freedom, and taking full advantage of the things that surround us. Environmentally friendly architecture and lifestyle are encouraged by minimalism. Energy-efficient techniques include using solar energy, renewable energy from solar power plants, isolated walls, ventilation, gardens, thermal heating, locally sourced materials, avoiding clutter, neutral color schemes, and living areas that face south.

Because it takes a lot of materials, energy, and land to build a structure, architecture is an environmental design that affects many aspects of nature. Furthermore, it has an ongoing impact on the environment for as long as it is around. A lot of architects and even clients are now aware of the benefits

of minimalism and ecological building and living practices. For those who practice minimalism, the outcomes are also visually pleasant and tranquil. Minimalism encourages designers to use as few resources as possible and users to live simply, without accumulating unnecessary items.

Because primitive designs were influenced by nature, they coexisted with it to provide maximum comfort without endangering it. Far from the natural world, modern designs have created an artificial one. We can overcome this delusion of establishing norms and accumulating material belongings by reintroducing traditional architectural styles and retreating into natural settings. Living in close proximity to nature and honoring its erratic forces was a feature of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese traditions. In their homes, they honored and accommodated nature's gifts by adhering to architectural tenets such as Vastu and Zen Minimalism. When these ideas are implemented into a structure, the result is an increase in spirituality, tranquility, and lively life. Traditional designs last a lifetime, while modern trends can only make a house look good while they're in style. Modern standards of material possession are criticized by minimalism, which also aims to teach people how to live simply, respect the environment, and lead peaceful lives.

In summary, nature is crucial to creating a sustainable way of life. Since sustainability is such a broad topic, it is impossible to achieve through efforts within a single industry. However, by implementing these architectural reforms and changing one's overall lifestyle, one can reduce their carbon footprint by approximately 60%. One step toward sustainability may be minimalism. Without a doubt, architecture's future may lie in minimalism.

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