

PIVOT



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IN DEMAND

How a part-time
CFO job can be
a multi-tasker's
dream and a
nimble company's
best asset



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Aspire CFO



**CPAs TAKE ON THE
HOUSING CRISIS**

**WHEN MENTAL
HEALTH AND
FINANCIAL
HEALTH COLLIDE**

**SOFT SKILLS MEET
HARD WORK**



EXTRAORDINARY ITEM

LESS IS MORE

Why everyone wants a 'minimaluxe' home right now
BY CORRINA ALLEN

It shouldn't surprise us that 'minimaluxe' décor is quickly becoming the defining home décor trend of the year. Echoing the way the quiet luxury trend has hit the fashion world, with leading

celebs and style icons eschewing logo-embazoned Louis Vuitton for The Row or Loro Piana, interior designers are also emphasizing a "less is more" aesthetic while at the same time demanding more *from* that less. The style, a portmanteau of "minimal" and "luxury," lowers the decibel on luxury, but raises expectations. Minimaluxe design demands more comfort, more cozy and more of a home-like feeling. It's gentle on the eyes, on the brain and on the body. A minimaluxe room is a

retreat—not into a bare, minimalist canvas, but into a space that embraces the visitor without distracting them.

Previously, luxury décor announced itself in a loud and immediate manner with gleaming metallic surfaces, dramatic angles and intense hues. For reference, picture the home of any *Real Housewife*. The current iteration of luxury whispers, using high-end fabrics, textured wall treatments, calming colour palettes and soft silhouettes replete with curved lines.



“I noticed about six years ago that the way in which students were reacting to projects was changing,” says Viz Saraby, professor of interior design at George Brown College in Toronto. “Prior to that, they would do pretty wild things—really experiment with ideas that would be considered exciting and challenging. Then, all of a sudden, everybody wanted to do spaces that were relaxing. They kept using the words ‘elegant but warm.’”

Interior designer Bahar Zaeem of the Toronto-based firm RZ Interiors says that she began to receive requests for minimaluxe looks from her clients shortly following the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. “A lot of

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professionals were working from home or were hybrid. We wanted a space with subtlety. We didn’t want something that disturbed our focus.”

To her, the minimaluxe look relies on the use of varying textures contrasted across different surfaces. Zaeem cites linen fabrics, white oak for cabinetry and flooring, and rich plasters for walls. She adds that natural light plays a big role in the look and that textiles and paints are selected for the way that light will

play off of them. “You’re not going to see bold colours,” she says. “You’re going to see surfaces that have character to them.”

When you combine these elements, she explains, the result is a muted, calm, comfortable space where “there’s nothing obstructive to your eye.” Instead of being instantly struck by a room’s bold design, people who enter a minimaluxe space relax into it, absorbing elements of the décor one by one—whether it’s a luxurious fabric on a sofa or a subdued but sculptural light fixture. One recent client, Zaeem recalls, told her: “I don’t care about the glamorous look. I just want it to feel like home to me.”

This longing, too, may stem from a desire to differentiate our homes from the spaces where we work. “Office design,” says Saraby, “used to be quite different from home design. Home design would have soft furnishings and offices would evoke some sense of prestige or importance with more steel and metal.”

Then, firms began creating office spaces that adopted the concept of residential design. “Companies started to put out office furniture with softer finishes. That was a dramatic thing to happen to office design. The driving force behind that was that people would stay at work longer if it felt more like home,” Saraby explains. The contest for more comfort and coziness was on,

driving us to create even softer spaces for ourselves to retire to after work.

The motive may even be psychological. A CDC study on exposure to stress conducted in June 2020 found that across a group of more than 5,400 adults surveyed, 40.9 per cent reported at least one adverse mental or behavioural health problem related to the pandemic. It’s possible that our tolerance for hard edges and sharp corners has been worn away by years of COVID stress, economic

uncertainty and the political flame wars these events ignited. The move away from physical discomfort and mental clutter makes sense and encapsulates everything from an avoidance of underwire bras to a distaste for harsh overhead lighting (as made famous by the TikTok meme about never, ever, ever using the “big light”).

“There’s so much going on in our world,” says Saraby. “You need a place of refuge.”

Stress factors aside, there is a potential positive outcome hidden in the move toward minimaluxe design: the idea that investing more money into higher-quality items could result in greater longevity for a trend that sees us working harder to preserve the items we have and consuming fewer items in the future.

“One of the courses I give is on retail design,” says Saraby. “What I try to do with the students is to ask them to design a space that sells things that are not temporary. Whatever you sell has to be worthwhile—something that’s durable, long-lasting, has character. I think this has started to take precedence over shiny and short-lived. There is kind of this underlying groundswell of interest in changing that up.” ♦

DESIGN

TEA TIME

This husband-and-wife team wants to make your morning cuppa healthier **BY REBECCA GAO**

Tea is one of the oldest beverages in the globe. And, after water, it’s the most consumed beverage worldwide. That’s why it’s so surprising that there’s been so little innovation when it comes to your morning cuppa. (The most recent big advance in the tea business was the invention of the tea bag around the turn of the 20th century). But with their company iLOLA Tea, husband-and-wife duo Tim and Su-Mari Hill are hoping to do just that.

About 12 years ago, the Hills were looking for a change of pace. Tim, a former CPA, had climbed the corporate ladder and was on track to be a partner at an accounting firm, but he wasn’t sure that’s what he wanted. “I had all the passion for business, more than my passion for accounting or finances,” he explains. Plus, the Hills had just welcomed their second baby and wanted to spend more time together as a family. So, they decided to start a business: 1902 Stores and Tea House in Gibsons, B.C., a quaint store that sold homemade scones and carried a large collection of organic tea blends. Soon, though, the Hills began to feel restless. They had been experimenting with fermented drinks, selling them through the store, and later through food service distribution companies. Spying yet another business opportunity—dealing directly with restaurant chains—they eventually closed up their shop and focused more on building up a beverage brand.

They had an agreement with a Canadian/U.S. restaurant chain, had sent inventory to suppliers and had started staff training, but then COVID hit, so the opportunity fell through.

As much of the world headed into their homes, so did the Hills’ tea business. Tim and Su-Mari did what so many other families did during the pandemic: they spent a lot of time in the kitchen, tinkering with recipes. With the potential negative health and environmental effects of tea bags in mind (some tea bags have been shown to leech microplastics and nanoplastics into every cup), the Hills created the iLOLA tea disc, a mini hockey puck-like disc of pre-portioned tea that’s held together with a house-made probiotic blend. The goal, says Tim, is to make a quality loose-leaf tea with the convenience of a tea bag.

But making loose-leaf tea easier to consume is useless if there isn’t a way to keep it fresh. Tea deteriorates when it’s exposed to light and air, which makes flavours and scents weaker and translates to shorter shelf

lives. Conversely, tea matures and tastes better over time when it’s kept in ideal conditions—and iLOLA’s tea discs are no exception. To solve this problem, the Hills invented the tea disc humidor, a sleek container that blocks air and light, and also moderates the humidity to create the perfect environment for aging the tea. There’s also a built-in diffuser that infuses flavour into the tea to improve the taste as it ages.



“Plus,” Su-Mari says, “[the humidor] looks pretty cool.”

Since pivoting their tea shop into an e-commerce site where they sell their discs and humidors, the Hills have been featured as one of Oprah’s favourite things and have pitched on the 18th season of *Dragons’ Den*, where they accepted a deal from Arlene Dickinson for \$750,000 in exchange for 25 per cent of the company. As for what’s coming down the line, the couple is hoping to build a subscription-based model for their tea discs and license the tea disc recipe to other brands.

“I think our kids will grow up and be like, ‘Oh, you *didn’t* have a fermentation room in your house?’” Su-Mari says. “We’re always dehydrating, blending, experimenting, figuring out how to do tea better.” ♦