

# International Journal of Multidisciplinary Comprehensive Research

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## Leveraging on 'simplicity' as a principle in the design of interior spaces

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### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2583-5289

**Volume:** 02

**Issue:** 06

**November-December** 2023

**Received:** 25-08-2023;

**Accepted:** 01-10-2023

**Page No:** 01-06

### Abstract

This study delves into the intricate relationship between simplicity and complexity in interior design, emphasizing the delicate balance between reducing superfluous elements and enriching the overall user experience. Grounded in the foundational philosophy of 'less is more,' the study explores the multifaceted aspects of simplicity in interior spaces. Through a comprehensive analysis of various theories and real-world exemplars, including the Guerrero House, the study uncovers the essence of simplicity not as a stark removal of elements, but as a harmonious integration of form and function.

The research identifies and dissects the essential principles for achieving simplicity in interior design, emphasizing a mindful approach to cultivating clutter-free spaces. Prioritizing quality over quantity, integrating functional minimalism, and harmonizing elements to create balanced proportions are pivotal strategies. The incorporation of eco-friendly materials and personalized designs underscores the environmental consciousness and individuality within the simplicity paradigm. Energy-efficient design principles are explored for their contribution to creating sustainable and serene living spaces.

Acknowledging the complexity of achieving simplicity, the study emphasizes the importance of regular editing and maintenance, often overlooked aspects critical to preserving the delicate balance between simplicity and functionality. Simplicity, in this context, is not about uniformity but celebrates the beauty of the essential; transforming living spaces into functional, adaptable, and serene environments, enhancing the physical and mental well-being of occupants. By expertly orchestrating light, texture, material, and space with precision, interior designers create spaces that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also deeply calming, promoting a lifestyle of tranquillity and balance.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMCR.2023.2.6.01-06>

**Keywords:** Simplicity, Complexity, Interior Design, Balance, Proportion, Eco-Friendly Materials, Personalized Spaces, Energy-Efficient Design, Tranquility, User Experience

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### 1. Introduction

The environment and spaces that we live in reflect our lifestyle. The space that is well organized according to human behaviour and needs is perceived to be functional and relevant. In other words, a space needs to be organized according to the user's lifestyle. Our living spaces mirror our ways of living and lifestyle. Essentially, a space should align with the user's lifestyle, with room functions determining their sizes and the overall arrangement of the dwelling. An organized environment, tailored to human behaviours and necessities, holds as much significance as air, energy, and water (Abdulqader *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[1]</sup>.

The request for the simplification of everything in a minimalist interior arrangement is characterized by the frequent use of sectional and modular elements and returning to the basic objects and elements that highlight the functionality with simple and

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clutter-free spaces with little to zero ornamentation. Simplicity in interior design espouses the principle, 'less is more,' the reduction of design to its essential elements. With smooth and uncluttered, contemporary-style interior spaces, furnished with fine finishing and also equipped with technological systems and high-quality materials that translate into functional minimalism.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Simplicity in Interior Design

Simplicity in interior design stands as a foundational principle in contemporary aesthetics, championing the elegance found in minimalism and the functionality of essentialism. Rooted in the philosophy that 'less is more' by Van der Rohe (1947) <sup>[15]</sup>, this design approach prioritizes clean lines, uncluttered spaces, and a harmonious fusion of elements (Smith, 2018) <sup>[21]</sup>. By eliminating the superfluous, simplicity optimizes the functionality of spaces, simplifies maintenance, encourages a sense of openness and ease of movement (Jones, 2017) <sup>[12]</sup>; and beyond its practical advantages, a simplified environment fosters mental clarity, reduces stress, and enhances overall well-being is generated (Clark, 2020) <sup>[7]</sup>. Moreover, simplicity in design promotes adaptability, ensuring that spaces remain relevant and timeless amidst evolving tastes and trends.

The 'functionality of essentialism' talked about emphasizes the functionality of spaces by simplifying them to their core elements (Gleeson, 2019) <sup>[9]</sup>. This foundational approach champions not just an aesthetic ideal, but a practical design philosophy that profoundly impacts the way people interact with their environments (Beyard, 2009) <sup>[5]</sup>. Essentialism in interior design ensures that every element within a space serves a purpose. Furniture, decor, and architectural features are carefully selected and placed to optimize the functionality of the room (Smith, 2017) <sup>[20]</sup>. For example, in a minimalist living room, a simple couch and a few strategically placed chairs can facilitate easy conversation and movement, enhancing the social functionality of the space (Lee, 2015) <sup>[15]</sup>. By removing unnecessary elements and clutter, essentialism creates open, breathable spaces. Rooms feel larger, and more inviting, and offer flexibility in usage, allowing individuals to adapt the space for various activities (Wilson, 2020) <sup>[23]</sup>. This openness not only enhances visual appeal but also fosters a sense of freedom and movement within the environment. This also extends to the practical aspects of maintenance. Fewer objects and intricate designs mean fewer nooks and crannies for dust and dirt to accumulate. Cleaning and maintaining a minimalist space are streamlined processes, making it easier for occupants to keep their environment tidy and organized (Johnson, 2018) <sup>[11]</sup>, in essence, promoting mental clarity by reducing visual noise and distractions. The absence of excessive ornamentation allows the mind to focus, fostering a sense of calm, reducing stress (Ryan, 2016) <sup>[19]</sup>, and promoting a sense of tranquillity (Pawson, 1996) <sup>[18]</sup>. This minimalist aesthetic aligns with contemporary wellness trends, where mental health is prioritized in design (Clark, 2021) <sup>[7]</sup>.

Harris (2014) opines that simplified spaces are inherently adaptable; their neutrality provides a canvas that can easily accommodate changes in decor or function. They are not bound by fleeting trends instead, they possess a timeless quality of adaptability which ensures that the space remains relevant and appealing even as tastes evolve.

Pawson (1996) <sup>[18]</sup> in his ground-breaking exploration of

minimalist design and the essence of simplicity showcases how minimalism can create spaces of unparalleled beauty and tranquillity. He explores the relationship between form and function, illustrating how minimalist spaces are not only visually striking but also incredibly practical. This essentialism inherently promotes sustainable living by discouraging excessive consumption and focusing on essential items; choosing quality over quantity and opting for durable, timeless pieces that contribute to a more sustainable approach to living spaces (Berg, 2013) <sup>[3]</sup>. The functionality of essentialism in interior design reaches far beyond aesthetics; a holistic approach that transforms living spaces into functional, adaptable, and serene environments. By embracing simplicity and essential elements, interior design becomes a tool for enhancing both the physical and mental well-being of its occupants, promoting a harmonious relationship between individuals and their surroundings.

The practical implementation of simplicity can be seen in various interior contexts; as case studies indicate that strategic use of space, materials, and colour palettes is essential in achieving minimalist aesthetics. Complexity was found to offer a rich tapestry of experiences, invoking a sense of mystery and depth, making the environment intriguing and captivating (Abdulqader *et al.*, 2015) <sup>[1]</sup>. Vervoordt (2002) <sup>[24]</sup> emphasises the appreciation of beauty in simplicity, balance, and the use of natural materials; advocating a philosophy that challenges conventional notions of interior design, deeply rooted in the concept of timelessness. He opines that true design mastery lies not in the ability to follow trends but in creating spaces that endure and resonate with a timeless quality, highlighting the interconnection between simplicity with grandeur and minimalism with opulence.

The role of digital technology and innovative design solutions in simplifying complex spatial challenges is also a derivative function (Norman, 2004), making them more manageable and understandable. By synthesizing academic research, professional expertise, and real-world applications, an understanding of how simplicity serves as a timeless and versatile paradigm in contemporary interior design is derived, enhancing both aesthetics and human well-being (Winchip, 2019).

### 2.2. Integrating the principle of simplicity into interior design

Integrating the principles of simplicity into interior design involves a thoughtful and intentional approach to creating spaces that are uncluttered, functional, and aesthetically pleasing. Doing so requires the following:

#### 2.2.1 Approach to Clutter-Free Spaces

Kondo (2014) emphasizes the transformative power of decluttering. Her KonMari method advocates keeping only items that "spark joy" in essence, personalization in moderation. This involves using space sparingly, avoiding unnecessary furniture or decorations; designed to have a clear purpose, and promoting a sense of openness and tranquillity (Vervoordt, 2002) <sup>[24]</sup>. In interior design, this translates to choosing furnishings and decor items that hold personal meaning and contribute positively to the space (Kondo, 2014).

#### 2.2.2 Quality over quantity

Susanka (1998) emphasizes the value of quality over quantity in home design. This principle advocates for investing in

well-crafted, enduring pieces over a multitude of items. In interior design, this translates to selecting timeless, well-made furniture and decor, focusing on enduring aesthetics and functionality.

### 2.2.3 Harmonizing Functionality and Aesthetics:

Simplicity in interior design can be seen as a balanced fusion of practicality and aesthetics, where every item serves a purpose and contributes to the overall design scheme (Gates, 2014); highlighting the synergy between functional elements and style. Furniture should be chosen for its functionality; often multi-purpose and devoid of unnecessary ornamentation, as well as following a logical and practical approach to ensure that the flow of space is smooth and unobstructed (Vervoordt, 2002) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### 2.2.4 Functional Minimalism:

Kondo's method encourages functionally organizing belongings, highlighting the importance of every item having a specific place. In interior design, this principle translates to furniture with hidden storage, ensuring a place for everything, and maintaining clean lines and open spaces.

**2.2.5 Balanced Proportions:** The proportions of furniture and architectural elements should be meticulously balanced, ensuring that the space feels harmonious and well-organized, with nothing appearing out of place or disproportionate (Vervoordt, 2002) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### 2.2.6 Energy-Efficient Design:

Bergman (2012) <sup>[4]</sup> opines that simplicity in design can also mean intelligent use of space and lighting. By optimizing natural light and reducing the reliance on artificial sources, factors such as building orientation, window placement, and architectural features can maximize daylight penetration (Bergman, 2012) <sup>[4]</sup>. This not only creates a bright atmosphere but also accentuates the simplicity of the space (Vervoordt, 2002) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### 2.2.7 Designing for Serenity:

Gates (2014) discusses creating serene and calming environments. Integrating simplicity here requires choosing neutral colour palettes (Vervoordt, 2002) <sup>[24]</sup>. Incorporating natural elements like indoor plants, and organizing spaces to evoke a sense of tranquillity (Gates, 2014) and limited colour choices help in maintaining a harmonious and often understated visual appeal (Vervoordt, 2002) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### 2.2.8 Personalized Spaces:

Susanka's (2012) approach often involves tailoring spaces to the specific needs and preferences of the inhabitants. Integrating simplicity here means designing spaces with essential, purposeful elements, and creating personalized, uncluttered environments.

### 2.2.9 Eco-Friendly Materials:

Bergman's work underscores the significance of sustainable materials in design. Integrating simplicity involves choosing materials like reclaimed wood, bamboo, or recycled metals, aligning with the minimalist ethos and promoting environmental consciousness.

**2.2.10 Attention to Detail:** Vervoordt (2002) <sup>[24]</sup> opines that while minimalist design is characterized by simplicity,

attention to detail is paramount. Every element, no matter how small, is carefully considered. From the texture of a wall to the choice of a single decorative item, each detail contributes to the overall aesthetic without overwhelming the space.

### 2.2.11 Regular Editing and Maintenance:

As new items come in, maintaining the minimalist vision requires a periodical assessment of the design and removing something to maintain balance which keeps the space looking fresh and uncluttered (Miller, 2019).

## 3. Research methodology

A descriptive case study research approach was used in studying and understanding how simplicity can be achieved in interior design. This required an in-depth understanding of the design concept of minimalism and the functionality of essentialism in living spaces, and relating it with the functionality of appeal.

## 4. Case Study

### 4.1 Guerrero house, Cadiz, Spain



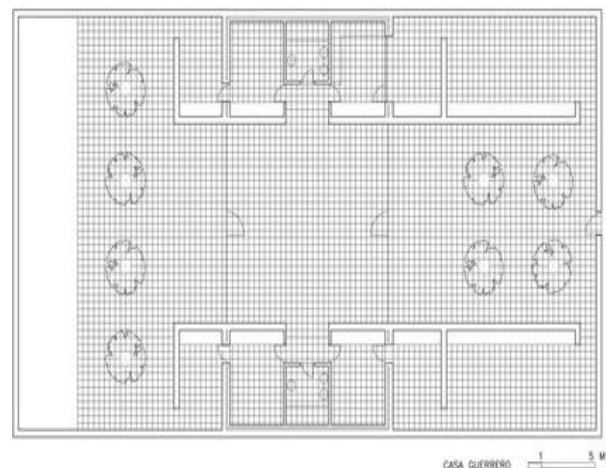
Source: <https://www.archdaily.com> (2023)

Fig 1: Interior of Ocean Front Bungalow and Secluded Bungalows

**Architects:** Alberto Campo Baeza

**Area:** 170 m<sup>2</sup>

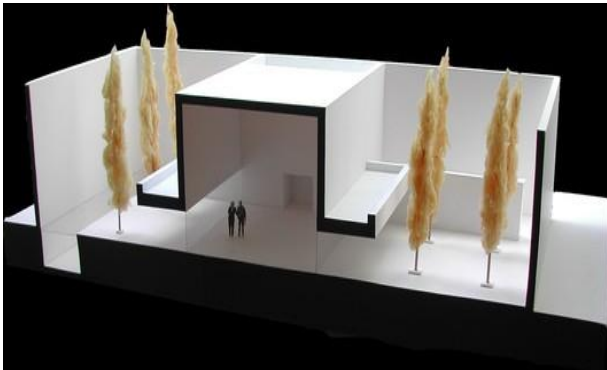
**Year:** 2005



Source: <https://www.archdaily.com> (2023)

Fig 2: Floor Plan of Guerrero House

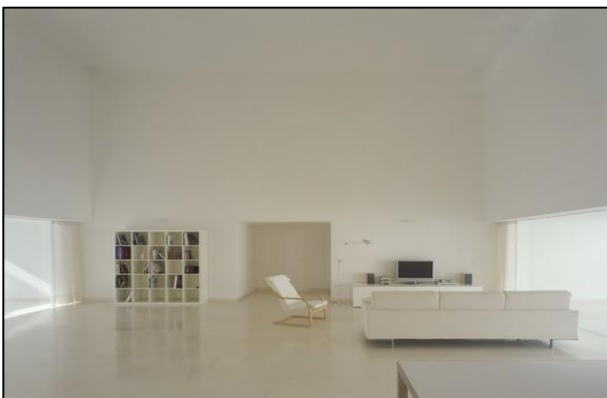
According to Alberto Campo, the house is a construction of luminous shadows, and a few parameters are required to build a well-balanced house full of light and shade. The walls are very tall at 8 metres high, covering a central strip with a raised ceiling to the same height as the outside walls. To either side, bedrooms and baths.



Source: <https://www.archdaily.com> (2023)

Fig 3: Cross-sectional 3D view of Guerrero House

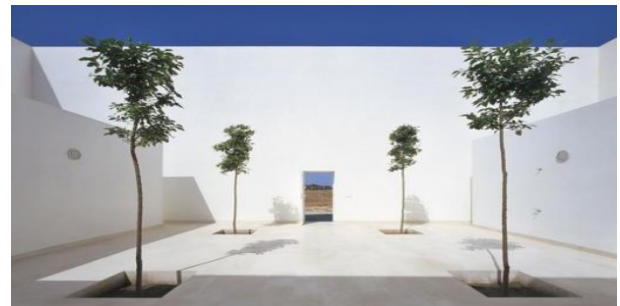
Filling the central space with shade required it to be opened to the front and back, creating 3-meter-deep porches that protect these openings from the sun, tempering the light.



Source: <https://www.archdaily.com> (2023)

Fig 4: Interior view of Guerrero House

In the front courtyard, the entrance to the house, four orange trees mark the central axis, flanked by low walls that hide service areas. In the back courtyard, another four orange trees are similarly aligned. And at the end, carved into the ground, a trough-like pond stretches from side to side.



Source: <https://www.archdaily.com> (2023)

Fig 5: A view of the front and back courtyard of Guerrero House

#### 4.1.1. Analysing the simplicity concept in the interior spaces

Table 1

Elements	Criteria	
Interior Space	Spatial emptiness	X
	Spatial occupancy	
	Ornamented	
	Unornamented	X
Colour	White colour	X
	Inherent colour of the material	
	Variety of colour	
Texture	Uniformity of colour	X
	Natural texture	X
Material	Artificial texture	
	Non processed	
	Natural material (processed)	X
Detail	Composite material	
	Flawless details	
Furniture	Detail less	X
	Fixed	X
	movable	
	Modular	X
	Pliable	

#### 5. Discussion

Integrating the principles of simplicity into interior design involves a thoughtful and intentional approach to creating



spaces that are uncluttered, functional, and aesthetically pleasing. Although simplicity fosters a sense of clarity and minimalistic elegance, promoting a serene ambience within a place, it does not detract from the rich tapestry of experiences that is attributed to complex interiors; invoking a sense of mystery and depth, making the environment intriguing and captivating. The process of reaching an ideal state of simplicity can be truly complex.

The simplest way to achieve simplicity is through thoughtful reduction; digging through the depth of complexity and understanding the functionality of essentialism and its ability to create a sense of openness and tranquillity within a space. Integrating the principles of simplicity into interior design involves a thoughtful and intentional approach to creating spaces that are uncluttered, functional, and aesthetically pleasing. Doing so requires the following:

1. Approach to clutter-free spaces
2. Prioritising quality over quantity
3. Harmonizing functionality and aesthetics
4. Embracing functional minimalism
5. Balanced Proportions
6. Energy-efficient design
7. Designing for Serenity
8. Personalisation in moderation
9. Eco-Friendly Materials
10. Attention to detail
11. Regular editing and maintenance:

The strategic use of space, materials, and colour palettes is required to achieve minimalist aesthetics, creating environments that are not only visually appealing but also deeply calming and functional. By integrating these principles, interior design can achieve a harmonious balance between form and function, creating spaces that are peaceful, and conducive to a serene lifestyle

## 6. Conclusion

In the realm of interior design, the pursuit of simplicity is not a journey towards starkness but rather a delicate dance between reducing complexity and enriching experiences. The essence of simplicity lies in the thoughtful reduction of unnecessary elements while retaining the depth and functionality of a space. The principles of simplicity in interior design, as outlined by various theorists and exemplified in real-world cases like the Guerrero House, demonstrate that simplicity is not merely about stripping away but about enhancing the harmony between form and function.

Simplicity is achieved through a mindful approach to clutter-free spaces, valuing quality over quantity, and harmonizing functionality with aesthetics. The integration of functional minimalism ensures every item has a purpose, maintaining balanced proportions and utilizing eco-friendly materials. Energy-efficient design and personalized spaces, along with attention to detail, contribute to the creation of serene environments.

The complexity of reaching an ideal state of simplicity is acknowledged. It's not just about removing layers but understanding the depth of essentialism and its ability to foster openness and tranquillity. Regular editing and maintenance, an often overlooked aspect, are crucial in maintaining the delicate balance between simplicity and functionality.

In essence, simplicity in interior design is not about

uniformity but celebrating the beauty of the essentials. It's a holistic approach that transforms living spaces into functional, adaptable, and serene environments, enhancing both the physical and mental well-being of its occupants. The interplay of light, texture, material, and space, when orchestrated with precision, creates spaces that are not just aesthetically pleasing but deeply calming, promoting a lifestyle of tranquility and balance.

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