



Japandi Living

Japanese tradition.
Scandinavian design.

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Lannoo



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CHAPTER 1.

JAPANDI

Scandinavian and Japanese design styles both encapsulate the philosophy of 'less is more', each in its own way. They celebrate refined quality, subtlety and craftsmanship and add a whole new definition to luxury. When put together, a unique new concept arises, called Japandi. The word 'Japandi' is a union between the words 'Japan' and 'Scandinavia'. Japandi focuses on simplicity and on creating a peaceful and warm environment with a minimalist layout. You might even say that it's more like a frame of mind than a way of decorating a space.

To understand how these separate parts of the world collided, we have to go back to the mid-1850s, when the Japanese opened their borders after a 200-year closed-border policy. Danish naval lieutenant William Carstensen visited Japan in 1863 and became fascinated by the country, its culture and, above all, its many enticing shops. He wrote a book entitled *Japan's Capital and the Japanese* that kicked off an interest in Denmark that never quite died out. Danish designers travelled to this new, intriguing world and discovered that the Japanese concept 'wabi-sabi' celebrated the same principles as the Danish concept 'hygge': an appreciation of minimalism, natural materials and simplicity. From that time, Nordic designs started to become influenced by the oriental aesthetic. That resulted in a perfect marriage between simplicity and elegance.



The minimalist home

A simple home environment that encourages a life well lived is increasingly important under the pressures of modern life. Your home should be a welcoming, warm retreat, a place to escape and unwind that inspires and energizes. In short, it needs to be a sanctuary.

One of the key ideas behind Japandi design, and one of the strongest links between Japanese and Scandinavian philosophy, is minimalism. Japanese and Scandinavian aesthetics both aim for simplicity, and strip away – as French writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry so appropriately put it – everything until there's nothing left but perfection. This most certainly does not mean that dwelling in a minimalist interior involves living in a spartan room without any creature comforts and having to get rid of all of your personal objects. Minimalism simply strips away ornamental layers that otherwise would be placed on top of an existing interior. Japandi's focus is on simple lines and light spaces, devoid of clutter. Japandi is a guiding principle for establishing harmony with one's environment – to create a home that is filled with quality items, one which enhances an unencumbered lifestyle devoid of excess consumerism. It invites, in short, peace into your home.

Japanese and Scandinavian minimalistic aesthetics lean heavily on the traditional principles of wabi-sabi and hygge. They may look quite different at first glance, but upon closer inspection they have a lot of similarities. Both cultures have developed in harsh natural environments and – although significantly different – at their core they are closely connected, both highly valuing nature, simplicity, authenticity and craftsmanship. As well as that, both concepts accept that time goes by and that one should move along with the changing of the tide instead of working against it. 'Wabi-sabi' and 'hygge' are words that don't have a direct English translation. They are concepts or states of mind more than anything else.

Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944)

Wabi-sabi

Wabi-sabi is a complex concept that derives from the principles of Zen Buddhism. It originated in China but evolved seven hundred years ago into a Japanese ideal. It was honoured by the Japanese nobility as a reaction against heavy ornamentation and lavishness. Wabi-sabi was the first step to satori or enlightenment. In modern times, wabi-sabi involves a slightly different ethos. It embraces the beauty of imperfection and being at peace with the imperfections of the world. 'Wabi' translates freely as 'rustic simplicity' or 'understated elegance'. 'Sabi' is understood as taking pleasure in the imperfect. Together, these concepts create a philosophy for life: to accept what is, to stay in the present moment and appreciate that nothing lasts for ever and nothing is perfect.





The art of imperfection: kintsugi

The Japanese practice that perhaps most exemplifies the spirit of wabi-sabi is kintsugi. Back when resources weren't so abundant, people were more likely to repair household items than replace them. Those repairs gave each object a unique appearance, their patina a silent witness to a life fully lived. Some historical sources suggest that the art of kintsugi – the practice of sealing cracks in damaged pottery with gold and lacquer – was introduced as an aesthetically pleasing solution to mending valuable ceramics. Kintsugi transforms broken pieces into a new object; the mended cracks become part of its patina and thus enhance its beauty.







Hygge

The Danish adopted the word 'hyggja' in the 18th century from Old Norwegian, in which it meant something like 'to think'. Hygge was traditionally attributed to the Scandinavian response to finding warmth and shelter after a long day working in the freezing cold. Although 'hygge' is often used to describe the way Danes survive winter, moments of hygge happen throughout the year.

Hygge is a kind of art form, developed by creating intimacy and warmth in virtually any moment. It can be celebrated alone or in groups. It's about finding happiness in simple moments. The biggest difference between hygge and wabi-sabi is hygge's emphasis on cosiness. The ways to hygge are plentiful and all promote your wellbeing, joy and comfort. To hygge is to relieve stress.

Tea ceremony

In both Scandinavian and Japanese cultures, tea and coffee are much more than just delicious hot drinks. Drinking them is an expression of an attitude towards life and an opportunity to relax in everyday life. These drinking ceremonies bring people together and have grown into important every day traditions.

The Japanese tea ceremony, or chanoyu ('hot water for tea'), is an elaborate ritual of serving green tea ('matcha'), along with some sweets. There are four philosophies portrayed in a Japanese tea ceremony: harmony, respect, purity and tranquility. The ceremony is a way to relieve the stress of everyday life, even for just a short while, by immersing in the Zen aesthetics of serenity and peace. These two qualities give the tea ceremony its simple and quiet appearance.

Fika

Fika originated in Sweden and is an important part of Swedish culture. It's much more than your regular coffee break and that's because the intent behind it is mighty different. Fika is about genuinely slowing down. It's a break from activity, to step back and to enjoy a cup of coffee or tea and something to eat with friends, family or colleagues. Fika can therefore be therapeutic, promotes wellbeing and productivity. Some companies even add a clause to contracts stating that employees are entitled to fika breaks.



The key characteristics of Japanese and Scandinavian interior design

When you think about minimalistic living, you are most likely to think of Scandinavian or Japanese interior design. Where they differ, they complement each other. Where Japanese interiors are sleek, Scandinavian ones are rustic. The rich, earthen colours of Japanese design help to keep the monochrome palette of Scandinavian homes from feeling austere. You might say it was only a matter of time before they mixed into the new aesthetic known as Japandi. Now let's zoom in on the particular characteristics of Japanese and Scandinavian interior design.





Idea and Concept

Laila Rietbergen

With her love for tradition, craftsmanship and the traditional principles of wabi-sabi and hygge, Laila Rietbergen's enthusiasm for Japandi kicked off before it became a world-renowned trend. After a trip to Japan in 2018, her love blossomed and set her on the path of her Instagram account @japandi.interior, with which she inspires her followers daily with the Japandi aesthetic. For Laila, Japandi is more than a decorating style; it's a lifestyle that helps to create a minimalist and tranquil home environment.

Texts

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Marlous Snijder (@ohmariemag) lives and breathes interior, vintage, trends and design and loves to write about them. She works as a freelance interior editor, columnist and author, has written for several major Dutch publishers, and has published a book about thrift shopping. In Japandi Living her love of interior design and gift for composing beautiful sentences come together in an elegant synthesis.

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Follow @japandi.interior to get your daily Japandi inspiration, and don't hesitate to send a DM message to Laila Rietbergen

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