

What happened to walls with texture?



Once upon a time it seemed like every building had white walls with some arrangement of swirls, bumps, or lines.

There are dozens of potential wall patterns, each with varying degrees of depth and complexity, that can be created after a wall has been built.



But, in the last decade or two, the world seems to have entered a firmly minimalist design phase.

Gone are the days of colour and detail, whether in graphic design or cars — this is the age of smooth, clean, flat finishes.

Even Serif fonts seem to have disappeared.

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Which is fine — much of this minimalist design is aesthetically pleasing.

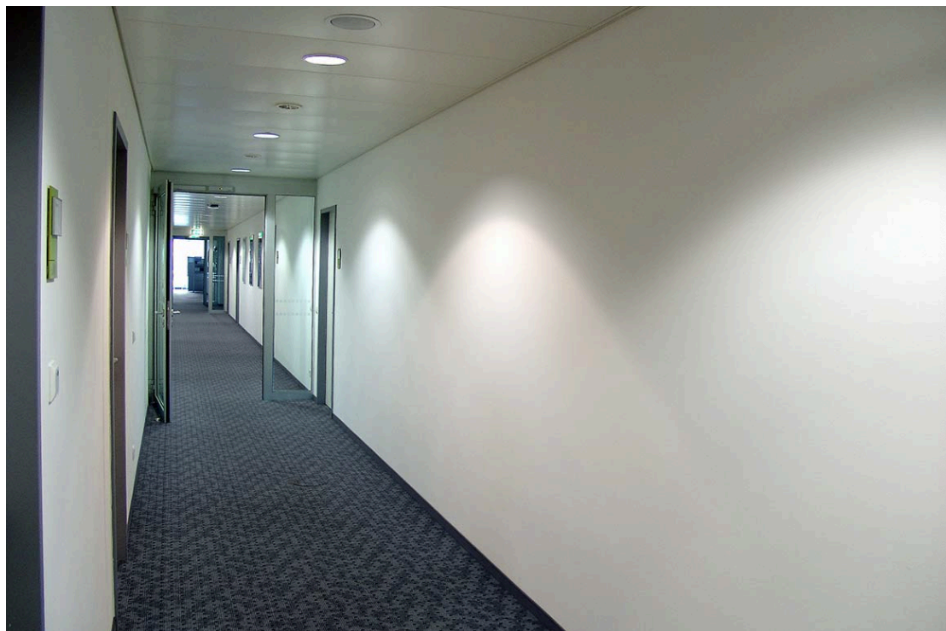
And, besides, there have always been, and always will be, trends.

Fashions come and go, and the minimalist age will inevitably end at some point; perhaps we should simply enjoy it while it's here.



But there is one particular aspect of this broad design fashion which might, in fact, be quite harmful — the rise of plain, utterly featureless, smoothly finished white walls.

They are everywhere.



And the trouble with them is that they lack any texture whatsoever.

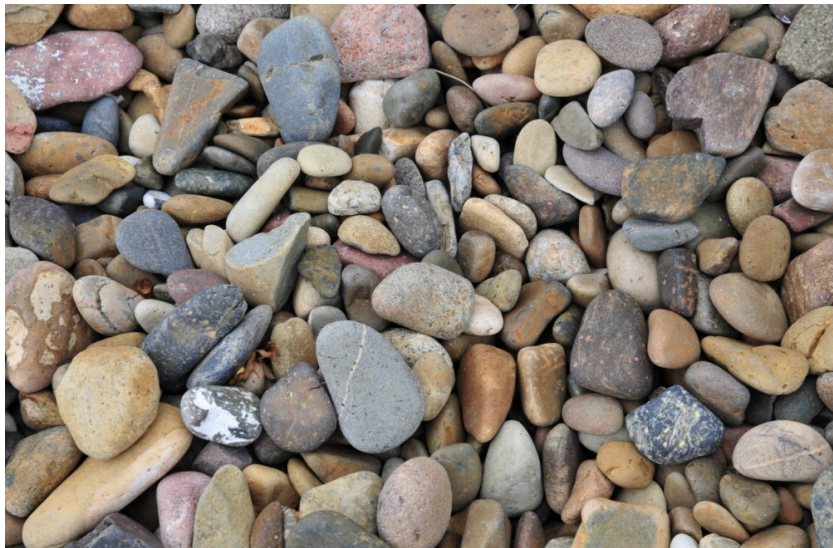
You could call it detail, but detail suggests a certain amount of decorative purpose.

This is different — because texture is more fundamental than decoration.

Why? And how? Because texture is a law of nature.

There are no (or, at least, very few!) smooth and featureless finishes in forests, meadows, beaches, mountains, rivers, cliffs, and so on.

Whether a whole jungle or a single pebble, there is always some level of texture.



Even the clouds have texture, and are changing shape and colour all the time.

Our world is itself an endlessly varying work of art better than any human could ever paint.



You need only look at a pile of autumn leaves on the side of a street!

They are ostensibly all the same, but within this image there are thousands of minute and subtle variations.



Hence people tend to like brick walls, all of which are slightly or sometimes majorly different, and in every case a sea of tiny fluctuations in colour, texture, shape, light, and shadow.



And so, as humans, we are naturally drawn to texture.

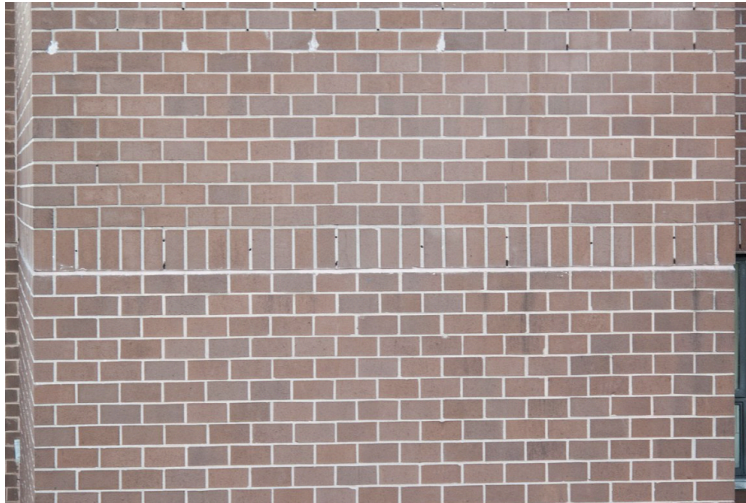
You can see how it is different from detail in the decorative sense.

This isn't about ornamentation and fancy flourishes; this is about a minimum level of texture in keeping with the appearance of the natural world.

Crucially, natural texture is **not** simply repetitive.

Think of those autumn leaves: they are all similar, but none are identical.

Hence new brick walls are less visually appealing than older ones: they lack the varied textures and colours brought on by age and weathering.



For most of the 20th century (which was, on the whole, a fairly maximalist time!) people gave their walls texture by default.

It simply made sense to have swirls, spirals, and bumps — even though it wasn't necessary, it just felt right.



Now those days are gone — and many people won't miss them.

But there is a danger to this change of design philosophy.

Studies have shown what we instinctively know; that featureless white walls can be psychologically and physiologically harmful.



A totally sterile environment with plain white walls, especially when lit with white lights, negatively impacts the mood and mindset of everyone from school students to office workers.

And this isn't only about health — productivity is also reduced in sterile environments.



And this is partly (but not only!) because texture is not a visual distraction.

Rather, it is a basic quality of the natural world, and so its absence ends up being more distracting than its presence.

Visual silence can be very loud indeed.



None of which is to say that people shouldn't have plain white walls in their houses — many prefer a clean, minimalist aesthetic.

But the problem is that featureless white walls have become the default design choice in offices, public buildings, hotels, schools, and elsewhere.



Sometimes plain white walls are necessary and helpful, as in hospitals and certain clinical settings, not to forget that any potential harmful effects can always be offset by texture, detail, and colour elsewhere.

The problem is when we are surrounded by nothing else.



Which brings us back to those old wall patterns. They may not have the same level of depth, warmth, and character as brick, stone, bamboo, thatching, wood, terracotta, or ceramic tiling...

...but at least they have *something*.

And that something is in accordance with nature.



So... should textured walls make a comeback?



Now return to [*He's a Twitter sensation: So I examine his writing and give you 10 reasons why→*](#)