

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

DESIGN

What Interior Designers Hate to See on Instagram

Too much social-media love can shorten a design trend's life cycle. Here, pros share which looks have been victims of their own success—and how to avoid getting stuck with one



AD NAUSEAM Instagram photos tagged #cactus or #cacti now number over 12 million, overexposing the prickly trend and possibly killing it. PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/ THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Tim Gavan

Feb. 27, 2019 2:05 p.m. ET

INTERIOR DESIGN concepts, once disseminated sluggishly via coffee table books and glossy magazine spreads, now zip around the world thanks to the chic multitudes who feed photo-friendly platforms like Instagram and Pinterest. On the latter, only food, crafts and women's fashion compete with home décor for clickability and fascination.

The downside: Social media has also seen many décor trends flame out prematurely. The explosion of posts inspires people to adopt the trend in their homes, only to find their acquisitions are less fun to live with than they were to “like.” Soon, these folks discover that overexposed styles have the aesthetic longevity of a Justin Bieber song. Victims of their own success include succulents (over 10 million Instagram posts) and macramé art (nearly 2 million).

“Unfortunately, social media has made the life cycle of a trend much shorter,” said Santa Monica designer Christine Markatos Lowe. “There’s such a need for likes and shares that once something catches on, everyone’s getting their own and posting it immediately and constantly to get their numbers up.”

According to New York designer Michael Tavano, a lust for likes is a lousy motive for buying a piece of design. “You can live on a daily basis with anything you truly love, but if you include it in your home because it is cool on social media, you’ll be over it pretty quickly.” And just as we must be content to observe certain clothing styles on more willowy humans, we need to accept that interior fashions don’t fit all dwellings.

Here, tips on how to find social-media inspiration for your IRL home without becoming the casualty of a short-lived trend.



PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (PHONE); GETTY IMAGES (CHAIR)

Define Your Tastes

New York designer Phillip Thomas warns against reproducing verbatim a space that you spot on social media: “The goal is to create something unique to you.” If aesthetic insecurity has you stymied and tempted to copy wholesale, take time to learn what you like instead. “Keep saving [images] that catch your eye, even for the smallest reason, and then when you’ve collected a large number, go back and look for repeated features like vintage rugs or steel-framed

windows,” suggested Newton, Mass., designer Erin Gates.

Hang on to Your Keepsakes

No two collections of family heirlooms, travel finds and accumulated tchotchkes are alike. Ensure a style as singular as your fingerprint, said Brooklyn textile designer Michele Dopp, by holding on to these idiosyncratic treasures. “Use designed spaces that inspire you as a base, but maintain a curated layer of things that mean the most to you and tell your personal story,” she said.

Beware the Swag Peddler

Companies seeking publicity have learned to exploit well-followed social-media personalities, spawning an ecosystem of biased endorsement. “There’s plenty of classy stuff on Instagram,” allowed New Zealand designer Helen M. Strevens, “but what really seems to generate the hits is...when a company sends an influencer free products to use and then, voilà, a million ugly deer-shaped mirrors are sold.” Because it’s tough to separate the honest taste makers from the bought, Ms. Strevens stressed, “Sometimes, the plainer the object is the less likely it is to get tiring.”

Consider the Context

Elements that work in a particular layout and style captured on Pinterest won’t necessarily translate well to your home. “I have a lot of dream spaces pinned that will have to remain a dream, as I don’t live on the beach or in a massive European manor house,” said Ms. Gates. “Those styles wouldn’t look right in my smaller New England Colonial.”

Mind the Blend

Purchasing every scone and ottoman that flashes across your screen can lead to an interior that Ms. Gates referred to as a trend monster. “I’ve seen people combine a farmhouse style with more glamorous finishes,” she said. “If your kitchen is shiplap and rustic wood, the adjacent space can’t really be all brass, Lucite and feminine, especially in an open-concept room.” In other words, “Log-Cabin Glam” doesn’t compute. And, no, every clash can’t be rationalized as “eclectic style.”

Bite Off Bits

If you love getting credit for being versed on the latest craze, Los Angeles designer Amy Sklar recommends embracing a trend in a way that won’t sink your whole interior should the trend tank within two years. “Try throw pillows, accessories, things you can change out seasonally or after a few years and that don’t cost an arm and a leg,” she said.

Nail the Scale

“When you see something and think it’s beautiful, whether it’s artwork, a rug or a bench, you have to remember to measure, measure, measure,” said Ms. Sklar. “Something can look great online that might not look great in your space, which doesn’t have the same 7-foot-tall windows or incredibly high ceilings.” She also advocated getting physical samples, pointing out that color and texture read very differently on monitors. “That sofa you think is light blue might turn out to be teal in real life.”

'GRAM SLAMS / The Social-Media Darlings Designers Wish Would Go Away

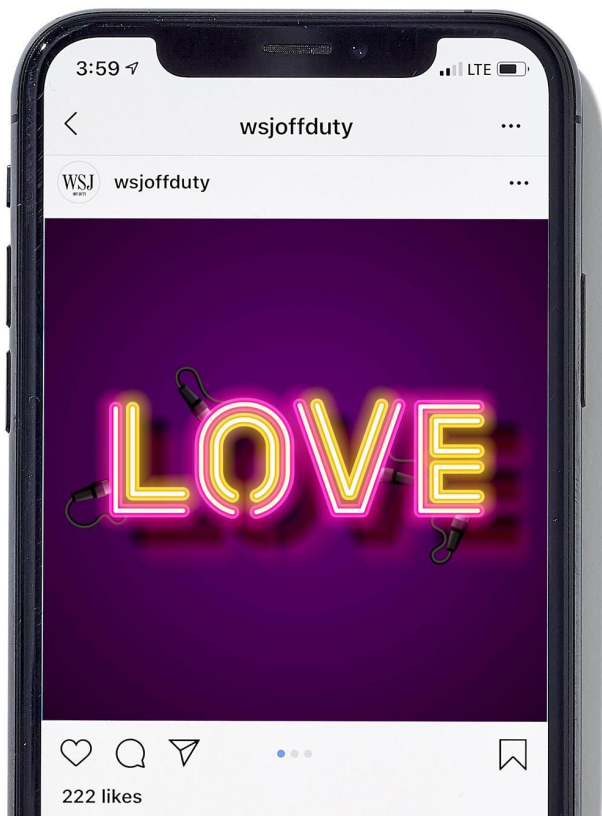


PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (PHONE); GETTY IMAGES (NEON)

Terrazzo: It seems only yesterday the classic Italian material resurfaced in contemporary interiors, but with 226,000 posts, it’s got a brightly speckled target on its back.

Millennial pink: What does it say that the misspelled #millennialpink appears 108,000 times and the proper #millennialpink 63,000?

Stacked Hermès boxes: The vivid orange containers

photograph well, but the nearly 150,000 images smack of conspicuous label lust.

Faux-farmhouse: Among the nearly 3.5 million #farmhouse images are over 150,000 #fauxfarmhouse (and its variations) posts. This trend is ready to be taken out behind the barn.

A-frames: Who knew there were even 150,000 of these overachieving structures out there?

Macramé: It came from the 1970s. And with nearly 2 million posts, it’s poised to go out in the ’20s.

Neon ‘sculptures’: With only 7,000 images tagged, perhaps the gaseous décor earns designers’ ire because it so frequently limns the four-letter word at left.

Dishonorable Mentions: Rose gold, shaggy Moroccan rugs, plant walls and vintage typewriters.

—*Catherine Romano*