



CULTURE & LIVING

Maximalism is making a comeback in India—and it's not just '90s nostalgia

As we hit peak sameness in fashion, interiors and design in pursuit of a unified global aesthetic, audiences yearn for the chaos and colour of their childhood. Four Indian creatives discuss the resurgence of maximalism

BY SAACHI GUPTA

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Zeenat Kulavoor reflected on India's penchant for maximalism in her research for *Everyday India*, an exhibition she co-curated with her brother, the contemporary artist Sameer Kulavoor. Images courtesy: Team Bombay Duck Designs

On her way back from school every day, Shivani Parasnis would slow down as she drew closer to a man selling knockoff movie and cartoon posters on Mumbai's Tilak Bridge. Turning to her mother, teary-eyed, she would ask if she could choose one to take home. "Even when I knew nothing about design, there was something about those posters," says the 32-year-old, now an art director at Spotify. "They were meticulously created using WordArt, which was so appealing to me as a kid."

Parasnis is not the only one mesmerised by designs that hark back to a simpler time. The last few years have been marked by a collective sentiment of growing frustration with the dreary, minimalist and often indistinguishable rebranding of several companies. People yearn for the whimsical visuals of the '90s and 2000s. "*Winx Club*, Troll dolls, *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, Cadbury Crackle's yellow packaging with purple triangles, Fatafat's orange packet with black polka dots," rattles off 29-year-old designer Tanya Singh, alias The Doodle Mafia, when I ask her about her inspirations. Victims of minimalism exist in plain sight. While you weren't looking, the fresh orange punctured by a candy-cane straw on the original Tropicana carton devolved into a glass of pale yellow juice. When Jaguar unveiled its new logo with a modern font minus the pouncing cat in November 2024, one of the most liked comments under the Instagram post read: "Congratulations. You've killed a British icon."



Tropicana's logo rebrand actually impacted sales negatively

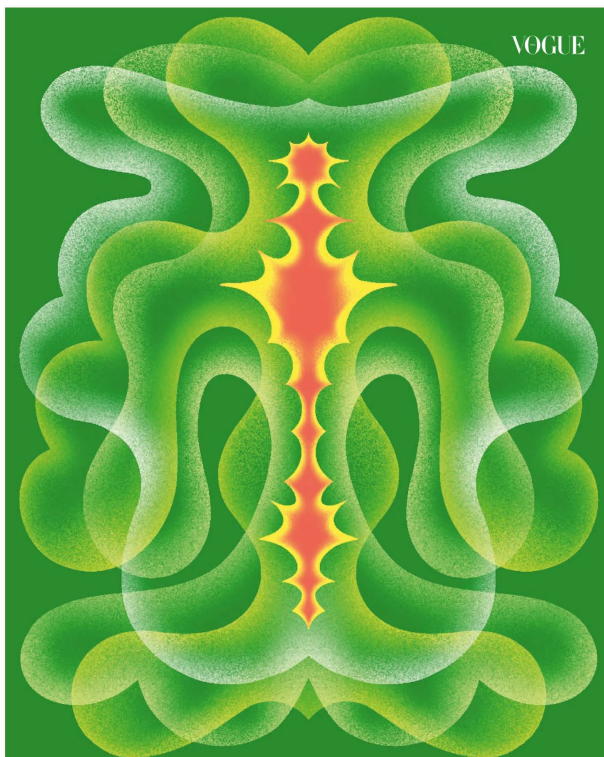
Jaguar's logo rebrands was widely criticised

X users believe that brands using serif fonts and blander designs is an indicator of a post-pandemic recession. Yet, if the current fatigue with this minimalist aesthetic is anything to go by, we are keen to return to the extravagance of the Roaring Twenties (which also followed a pandemic). Perhaps our dwindling attention spans are to be credited for the return of maximalism. In order to grab our attention while we're doomscrolling through Instagram, everything needs to be bigger and bolder.

VOGUE



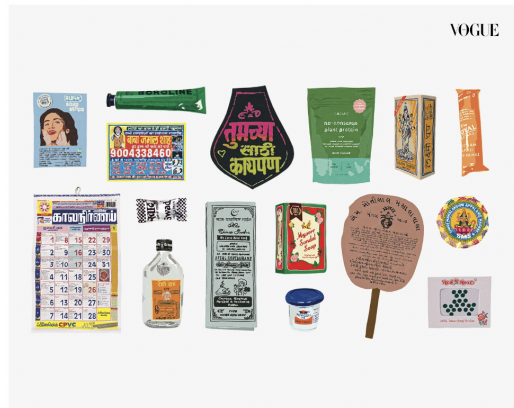
Shivani Parasnis makes fan art for old Bollywood tunes



India's visual landscape has been built on the very tenets of maximalism. From the idiosyncratic 'Horn OK Please' on the back of trucks to chaotic billboards wishing politicians on their birthdays in every font known to mankind, the brilliant colours and bold typefaces now making a comeback globally have long been visible in the subcontinent, shaping its regional uniqueness. Even Bollywood posters were once loaded with drama, vividly encapsulating the entire plot of whatever Amitabh Bachchan film was playing in cinemas.



Zeenaat Kulavoor, creative director at Bombay Duck Designs, points out that the connectivity made possible by the internet has led to the homogeneity in design we have now come to dislike. The 36-year-old recommends an exercise: compare a poster for a music gig tacked onto a bulletin board in Pune to a concert flyer plastered to a wall in New York. Can you tell the difference? Probably not, seeing as they both use the same brush scripts, high-contrast colour palettes and abstract designs.



Zeenaat Kulavoor reflected on India's penchant for maximalism in her research for *Everyday India*, an exhibition she co-curated with her brother, the contemporary artist Sameer Kulavoor. Images courtesy: Team Bombay Duck Designs

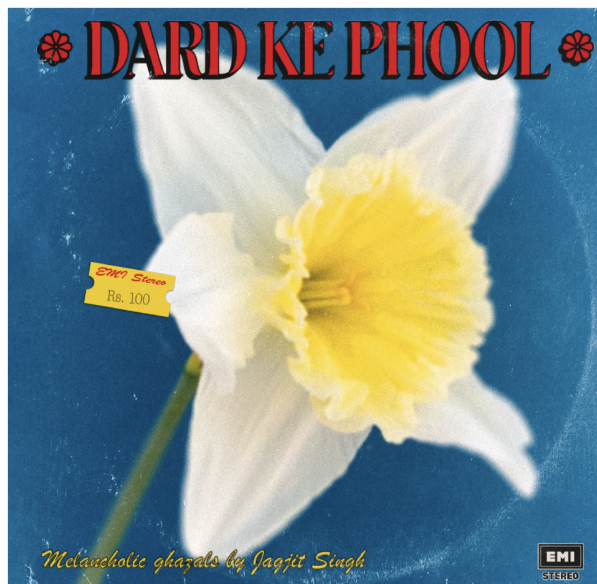


Urban Indian brands have realised the emotional connection hyperlocal scripts can inspire and are getting ahead of the curve. “Spaces like Subko in Mumbai and Neighbour in Thiruvananthapuram use locally inspired designs that embrace India’s diverse cultural and linguistic landscape,” Kulavoor explains, referring to the coffee roastery’s packaging that resembles local train tickets and the art gallery’s Malayali script for their inaugural exhibition. A return to maximalism is thus only a return to our roots; a decolonisation from the West’s polished and sleek mandate to embrace a local visual vernacular. “It’s a much larger movement that is deeply tied to reclaiming and celebrating regional voices, history and identity in design,” says Zeenat, who underscored the multiplicity of details on India’s streets in an exhibition she co-curated with her brother, the contemporary artist Sameer Kulavoor.

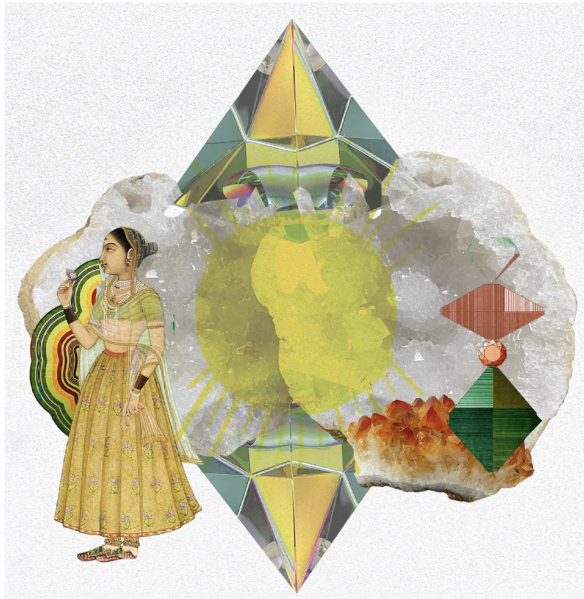


While Indian maximalism was once dismissed for being kitschy and cluttered, we now crave the rough imperfections that accompany it. As the world moves towards slick AI-generated content, we realise that it is the grain in photographs, brushstrokes painstakingly made by hand, even the scratch on a vinyl record slightly distorting audio that make art authentic and human. “Maximalism is all about being honest and expressive, obsessively letting it all out, wearing your heart on your sleeve,” says Singh. Chappell Roan’s video for her 2024 hit ‘Good Luck, Babe!’ does exactly this. With its pixelated cats, flashing neon colours, clown emojis and usage of Comic Sans, it has the earnestness of a 2014 One Direction lyric video laboriously made by a fan on Picsart past midnight.

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Shivani Parasnis makes fan art for old Bollywood tunes



Anika Sud, 'Untitled'

Amidst drab corpcore clothing, minimalist interiors and a McDonald's rebranding that many internet users describe as "happy child to depressed middle-aged adult", it is a relief to see the return of the same impassioned, chaotic aesthetics that so many of us grew up with. "There is an undertone of resistance to the new normal in these design choices," states Anika Sud, a 19-year-old illustrator who derives inspiration from [Savajit Ray's](#) film posters and Andy Warhol's pop art. "It's a rejection of the pure white office desk with a singular laptop and keyboard representing monotonous days of work that repeat until the end of forever." Ultimately, it's not just nostalgia for Cartoon Network and WordArt that so many of us seek in design. It's the burst of joy sitting inside a pop of colour.

This story appears in Vogue India's May-June 2025 issue, now on stands. [Subscribe here.](#)