



VOLUME IV

Wabi-Sabi: Adding Imperfect Beauty to the Home

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(Shamontiel L. Vaughn contributed to this post.)

When tenants are shopping around for a new place to rent, they want to see something that stands out. Too often, they see homes that may all start to look alike. Could the earthy, muted interior palette of wabi-sabi be the added touch that draws them in?



Read on to find out what it is, its pros and cons, and how to incorporate it into homes.



What Is Wabi-Sabi?

Wabi-sabi is an ancient principle that loosely translates as wisdom in natural

simplicity—or flawed beauty. According to **Japan Objects**, the term “wabi” refers to “the appreciation of a serene life.” “Sabi” refers to “the delightful contemplation of what is old and worn.”

The aesthetics are deeply rooted in Japanese history that (arguably) cannot be duplicated in today's age. However, some notable features can serve as interior design inspiration.



Zen Roots

Wabi-sabi has its origins in a Zen-inspired tea ceremony popularized in the 16th century by tea master Sen no Rikyu. The legend goes that Rikyu reached out to a recognized tea master named Takeeno Joo to help him understand the codes of the ancestral ritual of a tea ceremony.

When asked to take care of the garden, Rikyu cleaned immaculately. Then, he shook a cherry tree, and sakura flowers fell on the ground. Although decorative, it was neatly imperfect. From that, the concept of wabi-sabi was born.



Incorporating Wabi-Sabi In the Home

So how can property owners achieve a bit of wabi-sabi in rentals that will grab the attention of their renters? First, keep in mind that wabi-sabi aesthetics disregard machine-made perfection in favor of natural materials, organic asymmetry, and flaws in furniture and accessories from everyday wear and tear.

Rentals with neutral paint colors are already on the right track. The color scheme of wabi-sabi is composed of browns, greys, beige and natural green. Wabi-sabi is anything but flashy accent walls and statement furniture.

Consider simple interiors that appear lived-in rather than extravagantly styled: worn door handles, handmade pottery and bare brick walls. Cobblestone walkways, stone countertops and worn floorboards give that touch of familiarity and comfort that the style is known for too.

However, finding joy in minor imperfections does not equal messiness. Wabi-sabi leans more toward vintage appreciation—scuffs, collectibles and blemishes that a home collects over the years.



Buying On a Budget

A couple of trips to a local farmers market or thrift store may be all a property owner needs for budget-friendly add-ons. Look for affordable pieces like linen sofas, full-grain leather chairs, mismatching nightstands, antique dinnerware and stoneware bowls.

While Generation X and Baby Boomer shoppers may already be savvy at spotting these kinds of vintage décor gems, Millennials and Generation Zers are taking notes, too. According to the **New York Times**, demand for antique and vintage pieces is on the rise during the pandemic. Antique items like rugs, desks and table lamps alone are in demand anywhere from 20% to 80% on the online marketplace **1stDibs.com**.

Budget shoppers may luck up on surprising gems, too. In a recent **Good News Network** story, one shopper (in England) bought a wooden chair for 5 euros (or \$5.72) from a junk shop. It turned out that a simple chair was worth more than 16,000 euros (\$18,317.65) because of its checkerboard pattern linked to Austrian graphic

artist Koloman Moser (who died in 1918). She found this out simply from having it appraised.



Could the 'Worn' Look Backfire?

Interior design trends change, and so do houses. In Florida, Mediterranean homes (think of screen porches, private balconies, heated pools, tennis courts) were typical in 2017, according to **Insider**. Meanwhile, modern homes (visualize eye-catching horizontal and vertical lines, and chrome, steel or glass designs) were most prevalent in Texas.

By 2020, the National Association of Realtors confirmed that the most popular house style in both states is the **modern farmhouse**—sleek, contemporary lines with a country-living feel on the inside.

But is this vintage-meets-contemporary style appealing when a tenant walks in the front door? Maybe yes. Maybe no. Tenants in vacant, unfurnished single-family homes (or condo units) may want more control over what goes in and comes out of the house regardless.



However, short-term renters (and some long-term renters) who aren't interested in all the work that goes into designing and furnishing a home may be relieved by the ready-made décor.

Landlords who choose to be Airbnb hosts while waiting on a new tenant may want to use these interior design decisions as a branding method. Furnished homes also boost marketability. According to Million Acres, landlords can charge **30%** more for furnished homes of any kind.

While the laid-back elements of wabi-sabi may not be ideal for every resident, the minimalist interior design style is an easier choice for landlords to manage. Depending on the length of the tenant's stay, wabi-sabi may be here to stay or gone tomorrow. But the simplistic wabi-sabi approach can save landlords money and time.

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