

Is minimalism here to stay?

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By Chris Drost

During the Great Depression of the 1930s and during the Second World War, it was a time of scarcity. People lived on less and acquiring a household full of things was just not possible.

In the post war years, it was a time of prosperity when the rush was on to buy as many things as possible. Buying certain items gave the feeling of having "made it" financially. Good full-time jobs made for household financial stability. Meanwhile, more and more consumer goods became available.

Baby boomers collected everything from china patterns to sports equipment, toys and other "stuff" to fill every space in their homes and garages. Consumerism became a passion and a right.

The millennial generation, which are currently people age 20 to 36, now exceeds the boomers in numbers. This group has experienced challenges such as huge student loan debt, a recession, an explosive housing market and scarcity of full-time permanent work, and the world around them has changed considerably in recent years.

Millennials as consumers, are an entirely different animal than previous generations. They have access to hand-held devices that help them compare prices in an instant. They pay attention to concerns about the environment, cheap off-shore goods that end up in our land-fill sites, and consumer debt. A 2015 Norwegian study by Diana Ivanova et al showed that 60 to 80 per cent of the impact on the environment came from household consumption. Annie Leonard, author of *The Story of Stuff*, says that since the 1950s some 8.3 billion tons of plastic have been produced worldwide and to date, only nine per cent of that has been recycled.

While baby boomers are trying to find a home for the china and knick-knacks that were once so important to them, their children are saying no thank you. Second-hand shops are filled with the remnants of baby-boomer life - candle sticks, crystal vases and silver tea services.

Studies show that millennials are more interested in experiences than things. They would rather receive a gift of a weekend glamping trip than the latest coffee maker or panini press. Rather than buying a tool, they are more likely to share one with someone else or go to the closest tool library. This is why tool libraries are popping up all over the place.

Millennials are also much more interested in the walkability of where they live than the size of the house or rental space. This is why most gravitate to urban areas where it is easy to walk to local shops, schools and even work. It is almost a return to generations ago when not everyone had a car and you had to be able to walk to everything.

Minimalism doesn't mean doing without, it just means making choices and identifying priorities in the way you live.