

**Right** Fumio Sasaki's one-room home in Kyoto is simplicity defined



CLUTTER. THE C-WORD of the domestic world is often annoyingly omnipresent, from chaotic cutlery drawers and too-full-to-close wardrobes to the pile of miscellaneous objects that accumulate by the front door. But there is a solution – and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it can be found in Japan, where a Zen-inspired interior-design philosophy is gathering pace: kanso, meaning simplicity.

It's one of the seven key principles of Zen (others include silence and austerity) and in a domestic context, loosely translates into a home that serenely swaps the superfluous and decorative for the essential and functional, bringing a deep peace of mind in the process.

Japan is, of course, no stranger to all things clean and tidy. The kanso trend comes hot on the orderly heels of Marie Kondo, the decluttering guru famed for her global plea to dump anything that doesn't spark joy. In turn, Fumio Sasaki – widely regarded as Japan's number-one expert on the subject, thanks to his bestselling book *Goodbye, Things: The New Japanese Minimalism* – describes kanso as an antidote to society's constant desire to consume.

'We're all prone to addiction, not only to substances like alcohol and drugs, but also to shopping,' he says. 'Shopping is stimulating and has a certain allure to it. The problem is that no matter how much we buy, we still want more. As we get caught up in this cycle, we end up working ourselves harder in order to make the money to buy more things.'

He explains how the concept of kanso in Japan goes far beyond interior



decor ideas. 'Aspects of Japanese culture that embody kanso include the tea ceremony, which takes place in a tiny, bare room that allows participants to focus on their state of mind, or short poetry like haiku and tanka. But the ethos of kanso has been pretty much forgotten in our day-to-day lives, even in Japan.'

In Sasaki's life, however, the concept is very much alive. 'You could say that my diet is very kanso – I eat the same simple things every day: brown rice, homemade pickles, miso soup, plus grilled fish or a little meat,' he says. 'It may seem meagre to some people, but

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I am quite content with it. It may feel good to be captivated by something extravagant or impressive, but it can also feel quite good to simplify, which allows us to appreciate the subtle movements of the mind.'

Sasaki describes his current one-room home in Kyoto, with its interconnected bedroom and dining room, as 'simple and modern'. The word 'tiny' also springs to mind: it measures a diminutive 30 sq m. Costing around £202 (30,000 yen) a month, it is the domestic equivalent of kanso.

Unlike the Tokyo apartment he once lived in – which was crammed full of piles of CDs and random ornamental