

The Minimalist

IN 1991, BELMONT FREEMAN turned 40 and started paring down his life. He ended a long-term relationship, sold off most of his books and art, and cleaned out his closets. His one addition—and it was major—was a Riverside Drive penthouse that he gut-renovated in 2000 as a minimalist mission statement for his architectural practice. “Life can be better with less,” says Freeman, who shaves his head to avoid dealing with hair upkeep. “Living this way makes me feel clean.”

Freeman limited himself to four building materials—white plaster walls, white lacquered-wood cabinetry, stainless steel, and blue-gray terrazzo floors (no rugs). The few furnishings are strictly black, gray, or light wood. Of the one small sofa, a George Nelson daybed, he says: “I can only sit in one place at a time.”

His favorite appliances are appropriately invisible: The Miele G843 dishwasher has controls on the inside and is fronted with the same white Formica as the kitchen cabinets; likewise the Sub-Zero 700 Series. “People walk into my kitchen and have no idea where the refrigerator is,” he says. Decoration is limited to a \$20 mud cloth from Mali and a Jim Dine lithograph. He has other things in storage, but, he says, “I don’t need to display every book I’ve read to prove my credentials as a literate human being.”

Needless to say, Freeman isn’t exactly stoking the economy; mostly he buys food. His few CDs—hidden in a built-in drawer—are minimalists Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and La Monte Young. His wardrobe comes almost entirely from Barneys New York, and consists of Yohji Yamamoto, Issey Miyake, and especially Jil Sander, whose iconic techno suit he cherishes. He tries not to look at postmodernist “atrocities” like Philip Johnson’s AT&T Building.

Living in a cluttered world takes discipline for someone who values, above all, open space. Freeman opens mail the day it arrives, answers correspondence immediately to avoid “psychological clutter,” and limits the duration of visits to his sister’s “filled-with-things” house. “The world would be a much better place if people came to their senses and realized they don’t need to live such acquisitive lives,” he explains.

R.C.

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Belmont Freeman in his Upper West Side penthouse.

