

Simplify your home, health,
and lifestyle with the help
of Scandinavian minimalist
expert Jenny Mustard.

In a beautiful collection of essays, *Simple Matters* challenges readers to simplify their life by prioritizing emotional and physical health, curating a personal style, and pursuing their dreams. Jenny Mustard has created a unique lifestyle book that taps into the ever-increasing human longing for less clutter and more meaning, be it at home, at work, or in our relationships. By encouraging readers to make their surroundings a little more lovely, to simplify eating habits and wardrobe, to travel with purpose and ease, and to discover what they truly want to dream about and focus on, Jenny provides the inspiration to curate one's everyday life into something simple, realistic, and utterly enjoyable.



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JENNY
MUSTARD

JENNY MUSTARD

SIMPLE MATTERS
A SCANDINAVIAN'S APPROACH TO WORK, HOME, AND STYLE

SIMPLE MATTERS



A SCANDINAVIAN'S APPROACH TO WORK, HOME, AND STYLE



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INTRODUCTION

Simplicity: a word with such boring connotations. Going simple might bring to mind a life full of sacrifice, self-control, and sound shopping behavior. Not very sexy sounding, is it? Although I'm aware that this take on the word is widespread, my perception of simplicity is another. As a born and raised Swede, moderation was included in the mother's milk. Our population is small, our language is small, and our wish for extravagances even smaller. We find beauty and calm in the understated, as you're probably well aware if you've ever picked up a Scandi interior design magazine.

My love for the simple matters isn't only because of my Swedish upbringing, though. Sure, my apartment is sparse and clean, and my wardrobe free from flamboyances such as primary colors, but my simplicity vein runs redder than that. Often less to do with my physical surroundings, and more with the weird and wondrous place of the mind. Less to do with the number of possessions I have, or the monochrome level of my wardrobe, and more with getting into a frame of mind I enjoy spending time in, no matter the size and shape of that particular frame.

I believe that getting to know ourselves—our preferences, dreams, and needs—and then having the guts to go after them, is a pursuit worthy of our increasingly hard-to-capture attention. Asking what we want for ourselves, and listening intently to the answer. To do this we need to give our minds some space: a space full of energy and time, and free from chatter and distractions. Not to mention being free from the demands of society, from leading a life someone else has told us we want.

Now we're moving into my territory, of seeing simplicity as freedom from rather than sacrifice of. A word describing laser-focus: paying attention to ourselves, instead of to the myriad things we're indifferent to or find unnecessary. This way of living has, for me at least, proven to be utterly enjoyable. Not an ascetic experience void of emotions or wishes, but one of everyday pleasures, of feeling like I'm being true to myself. Of giving a bit of a damn, and prioritizing what matters. Of throwing out the cookie cutter and going freehand.

I don't know about you, but I find the freehand kind of attention level hard to reach without some serious noise reduction. My hope is that this book might offer you some of those mental earplugs, and help create a space with the luxurious kind of simplicity, and everyday pleasures aplenty. Few things are as enjoyable as the flipping of pages after all.

So enjoy. Simply put, it's my pleasure. ■



THE RED THREAD

The idea of the red thread is lovely in that it's so obvious once we start to notice it. It's not one of those sayings that take years of philosophical discussion to interpret and appreciate. In its own simple way, it can add focus, comprehension, and clarity to any number of complicated situations. To the scatter-brained, it's a lifesaver.

Den röda tråden (literally “the red thread”) is a saying we Swedes use to highlight the subtle, unspoken theme of a narrative. The central idea that connects all parts of a concept, tying everything together neatly from beginning to end. If lost, the concept becomes unclear, and we feel confused and disoriented. In Sweden, we grow up with teachers telling us whether or not we have the red thread every time they correct one of our papers. As adults, we get compliments on our home's possession of it, adding a calming cohesion to the interior design. With a red thread up our sleeve, we can make the most complicated annual report comprehensible to our coworkers. A magazine, filled with narratives from different writers and photographers, needs an editor with a firm grip on the thread, making sure the issue never loses its way and becomes too scattered. But mostly, it's the tool of the teacher: where's the red thread? is a question they enjoy hitting us over the head with, until we start seeing it everywhere. And become more focused because of it.

Although it is traditionally used to describe the consistency

of a narrative, it's useful in all situations that can, in any way, be said to tell a story. Our homes, dinner menus, wardrobes, lifestyle philosophies, and exercise routines—all will gain clarity by following a red thread. We can see it as a keyword.

Say you're planning your wedding. I've personally never tried my luck at this monster of a mission, but I hear that it's one of the most confusing and overwhelming projects a person takes on willingly. There are an incredible number of choices to be made, from food and location, to outfits and guest lists. Music, vows, flowers, underwear, seating, dress codes, budget, rings, and something blue. Just the thought of it is enough to cause headspinning. The red thread here can create order in the chaos. Once you decide on the theme for your wedding, the planning will become simpler, gain clarity and focus, and seem less daunting. If the thread is 1920s luxury, a quirky 1950s retro dress doesn't really make sense. Fewer choices ease the confusion, and your thread of choice will render the decision-making enjoyable. Imagining what to eat at a splendid 1920s dinner party is bound to spark your wedding menu imagination. Unlike a declared theme, the red thread is usually very subtle. Not a single guest needs to be told of, or even notice, the 20s lux thread to appreciate it. The thoughtful subtlety is what puts the recipient of a threaded narrative at ease. It might be red, but it is often surprisingly invisible. ■

BEING WELL-ROUNDED,
UNSEXY AS IT MIGHT
SOUND, COULD VERY
WELL BE THE NEXT
BIG THING.



SOCIAL MEDIA—A DEFENSE

Nowadays, I feel like everything you hear about social media is negative. The unreasonable pressure it puts on us, the addiction that hinders us from ever logging off, and above all the fakeness with which people present themselves on their profiles. Listening to all the criticism and bashing, it’s easy to start feeling like making an effort with your Instagram account is something bad. Like you should never trust anyone’s breakfast pics because they’re probably faking it—who has time to make beautiful porridge like that on a weekday anyway? It’s as if you have to excuse yourself for posting a pretty vacation pic or for seeming happy on a Monday morning. And, hey, these are all valid points that are seriously worth discussing in a world where social media is almost becoming more important than IRL interactions. That talk is for another day, though. Because today, I want to balance the discussion a little bit. Social media—this is in your defense!

Let me start from the beginning. A few years back, before I got an Instagram account, I felt like I wanted to make a bigger effort in life. I wanted to have more beauty and serenity around me. And I wanted to learn how to appreciate all the goodness that I saw. The goodness that I saw, but never really noticed, if you know what I mean? Mucking about in your everyday life, it’s hard to remember to appreciate all that beauty. It’s hard to motivate yourself to fluff that pillow, look up at the architecture around you, to remember to bring home fresh flowers, and make the bed neatly.

Quite unexpectedly, Instagram changed all of that for me. Suddenly I saw beauty everywhere, in a neat square-shaped format. Everywhere I saw those squares of loveliness just waiting to be captured. And it made me fluff those pillows, keep a clean kitchen, place the food beautifully on the plate, and dress a little bit nicer even when just at home by myself. It didn’t even

matter whether I picked up the phone to snap a photo or not. It wasn’t just about sharing beauty with someone else. It was about enjoying it all by myself too. Of course, you can call this fake. You can say that it’s all just about showing off or pretending to live a life more impressive than reality. Sure. I don’t mind that comment. But I see it this way: whenever one of our favorite musicians releases a new album with beautiful songs for us to enjoy, do we also insist on hearing all the crappy songs that didn’t make the cut? Do we feel the need to hear all the out-of-tune singing, to see the stress and exhaustion of the recording sessions? Because otherwise the beauty of the song feels fake? Or do we just relax, lean back, and thank the artist for sharing their version of beauty with us? For going through the stress and the out-of-tune singing and the long recording hours just to create something stunning for us?

My home isn’t always as clean as when I take photos for an interior-design blog post. Whenever I take a food pic, chances are there might be a messy kitchen in the background somewhere. And for every photo taken where I actually look good, there are heaps and heaps of bad ones, where I look like a little freak. But here’s the thing—whenever I make myself or my home or my food more beautiful to take a photo of it, it also means that I have pretty food, a clean home, and a stylish Jenny to enjoy even after the camera has stopped snapping. And this has transformed my life into a more gratifying, pleasant, and happy place to spend time in. But of course, there is ugliness in all our lives. I don’t mind showing a bit of that too from time to time. As I see it, though, there is enough badness in the world that I don’t want to spend my days contributing to it. I prefer sharing and receiving more of calm, beauty, and serenity. I don’t see that as being fake. I see that as knowing my priorities. ■





FREEDOM FROM ADDICTION

Being free from addiction is one of the biggest reasons for my happiness. Yes, that's right—I consider myself to be a happy person. It's very odd to write that down, because growing up, I never identified with happy. Nor did I believe that I ever would. I'm sensitive, and I've always been easily upset by all the wrongs going on in this world. But now I'm happy. There is, of course, more than one reason for this, David being a huge one. However, let's talk about one reason which might be a bit unexpected: the chemical one. To be precise, the effect addiction might have on our happiness and well-being. And I'm not only talking about narcotics or alcohol—I mean just about anything you can get addicted to: sugar, caffeine, fat, nicotine, and painkillers, to name a few.

We've all probably experienced some form of addiction, be it mild or serious. Let's take a look at smoking, for example. The first time you try it, it's going to shock your system. You'll get a kick, it's going to taste weird, and your body will probably give you signals that this is too strong, too much to handle. When

you've smoked a few times, you'll get the kick without the warning signals. If you start smoking daily you soon won't get the kicks anymore—your brain will get desensitized. After a while you'll need a cigarette just to feel normal, and you'll get low and distraught without smoking. Being on nicotine has now become your normal state.

We can apply this to anything addictive—sodas, coffee, chocolate, junk food, or wine. Basically anything that you crave every day, and just the thought of quitting this stresses you out. That the brain loses its sensitivity for the pleasure spikes smoking causes might seem obvious, and maybe even like a small problem. But here's the kicker: when the brain loses the sensitivity to enjoy a smoke, it seems to also lose the sensitivity for other pleasures. Some studies have been made on this, and I find the results quite amazing: it seems that the more addicted you are to different substances, the less you're able to enjoy life's other pleasures too. If you're addicted to white sugar, a handful of blueberries probably won't taste as good. If you're addicted to