

TECHNOLOGY

The Instagram Aesthetic Is Over

The look made famous by the platform just doesn't resonate anymore.

TAYLOR LORENZ APRIL 23, 2019



OKAWA SOMCHAI / SHUTTERSTOCK

As Instagram has grown to more than 1 billion monthly users, it has ushered in a very particular look: bright walls, artfully arranged lattes and avocado toast, and Millennial-pink everything, all with that carefully staged, color-corrected, glossy-looking aesthetic. Photos that play into these trends perform so well on Instagram that the look became synonymous with the platform itself, then seeped into the broader world. Even if you don't use the app, you've undoubtedly encountered an "Instagram wall," a pop-up experience like the Museum of Ice Cream, or a brightly patterned restaurant bathroom just made to be photographed.

No one has even started to fit this mold. Bright pink pastel m... generic a... it will be... pseudon... have even... ctures to fit this pink walls and beach. It's so ckgground and to by a

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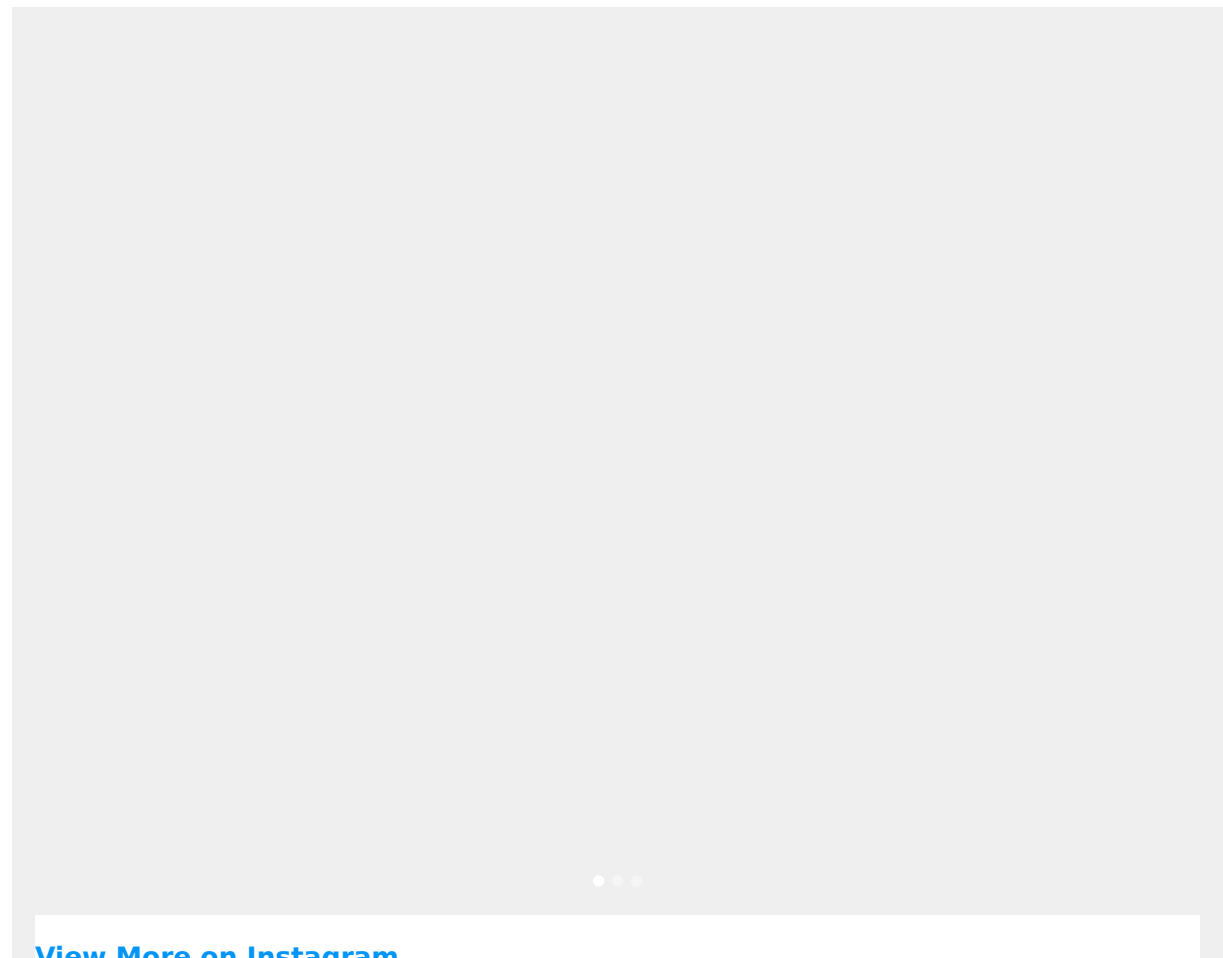
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Fast-rising young influencers such as [Emma Chamberlain](#), [Jazzy Anne](#), and [Joanna Ceddia](#) all reject the notion of a curated feed in favor of a messier and more unfiltered vibe. While Millennial influencers hauled DSLR cameras to the beach and mastered photo editing to get the perfect shot, the generation younger than they are largely post directly from their mobile phones. “Previously influencers used to say, ‘Oh, that’s not on brand,’ or only post things shot in a certain light or with a commonality,” says Lynsey Eaton, a co-founder of the influencer-marketing agency [Estate Five](#). “For the younger generation, those rules don’t apply at all.”



ewww_its_joana
600.9k followers

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150,390 likes

ewww_its_joana

Yes more... [View all](#)

view all

Add a c...

In fact, [Cam](#), w

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camera, has been downloaded more than 16 million times. “Adding grain to your photos is a big thing now,” says Sonia Uppal, a 20-year-old college student. “People are trying to seem candid. People post a lot of mirror selfies and photos of them lounging around.”

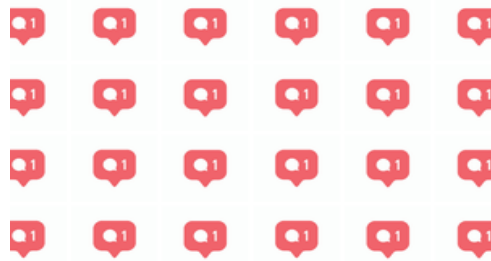
Take Reese Blutstein, a 22-year-old influencer who has amassed more than 238,000 followers in just over a year by posting unfiltered, low-production photos of herself in quirky outfits. (A recent flash photo into a mirror with her dog picked up more than 5,000 likes). She, like many members of her generation, doesn’t stress about posting almost the exact same photo twice in a row, something first-generation influencers wouldn’t dream of. “I’m not afraid to over-post. I don’t think, *Oh, will this mess up how my feed looks,*” she says. “I don’t think too much about it. If I like an image, I just post it.”

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Anything that feels staged is as undesirable for Blutstein’s cohort as unfiltered or unflattering photos would be for older influencers. “For my generation, people are more willing to be who they are and not make up a fake identity,” she says. “We are trying to show a real person doing cool things as a real person, not trying to create a persona that isn’t actually you.”



double3xposure
301.4k followers

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Matt Klein, a cultural strategist at the consultancy Sparks & Honey, also says he's seen a gradual shift away from the rainbow-colored preplanned photos that dominated the platform in late 2017. "We all know the jig is up," he says. "We've all participated in those staged photos. We've all been part of it. And we've all been through it."

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showing off their faces in sunlight. As the public becomes more aware of the prevalence of sponsored posts, beauty influencers are abandoning branded shots for ones that show off their “empties” (empty bottles of product they actually use). A growing number of accounts are dedicated to calling out the various cosmetic procedures celebrities and influencers have had. Influencers have also been actively speaking out themselves about burnout, mental health, and the stress that comes with maintaining perfection.

[Read: [The post-Millennial generation is here](#)]

“Everyone is trying to be more authentic,” says Lexie Carbone, a content marketer at Later, a social-media marketing firm. “People are writing longer captions. They are sharing how much money they make ... I think it all goes back to, you don’t want to see a girl standing in front of a wall that you’ve seen thousands of times. We need something new.”



emmachamberlain
9.3m followers

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2,223,174 likes

emmachamberlain

jojo chamberlain

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James Nord, the CEO of Fohr, an influencer-management platform, says he sees this shift play out in his clients' numbers every day. "What worked for people before doesn't work anymore," he says. "For the first time, influencers are coming up against this problem of, *How do I continue to grow as tastes change?*" A year ago, an influencer could post a shot with manicured hands on a coffee cup and rake in the likes—but now, people will unfollow. According to Fohr, 60 percent of influencers in his network with more than 100,000 followers are actually losing followers month over month. "It's pretty staggering," he says. "If you're an influencer [in 2019] who is still standing in front of Instagram walls, it's hard."

The platform itself could be partially responsible for how things have evolved. Whereas Instagram started as a purely visual feed of filtered photos, it has morphed into a messy, tangled social network where photos fight with stories, [IGTV](#), GIFs, and video clips for attention. For many users, a photo itself is just a way to [vent in the captions](#) or [comment section](#).



emmachamberlain

9.3m followers

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1,321,859 likes

emmachamberlain

getting sick of the cold weather. i cant stand outside for more than 7 mins

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According to Taylor Cohen, a digital strategist at the advertising agency DDB, the Instagram aesthetic's saturation point came sometime in mid-2018. "It's not the same as it was even a year ago," she says. Consider, for example, the Happy Place, an Instagram museum that opened to great fanfare in Los Angeles in 2017 and bills itself as the "most Instagrammable pop-up in America." When it opened, people were thrilled to fork over the nearly \$30 admission price (\$199 for a VIP pass). But when it arrived in Boston this month, it landed with a thud. "I would not go," said Claire, the 15-year-old. "I'd rather take pics in front of a library or something."

Instagram museums and walls were built to allow normal people to take i encer-quality photogr: on enough that they on enough these no ne posting so many "But because overload a influencer

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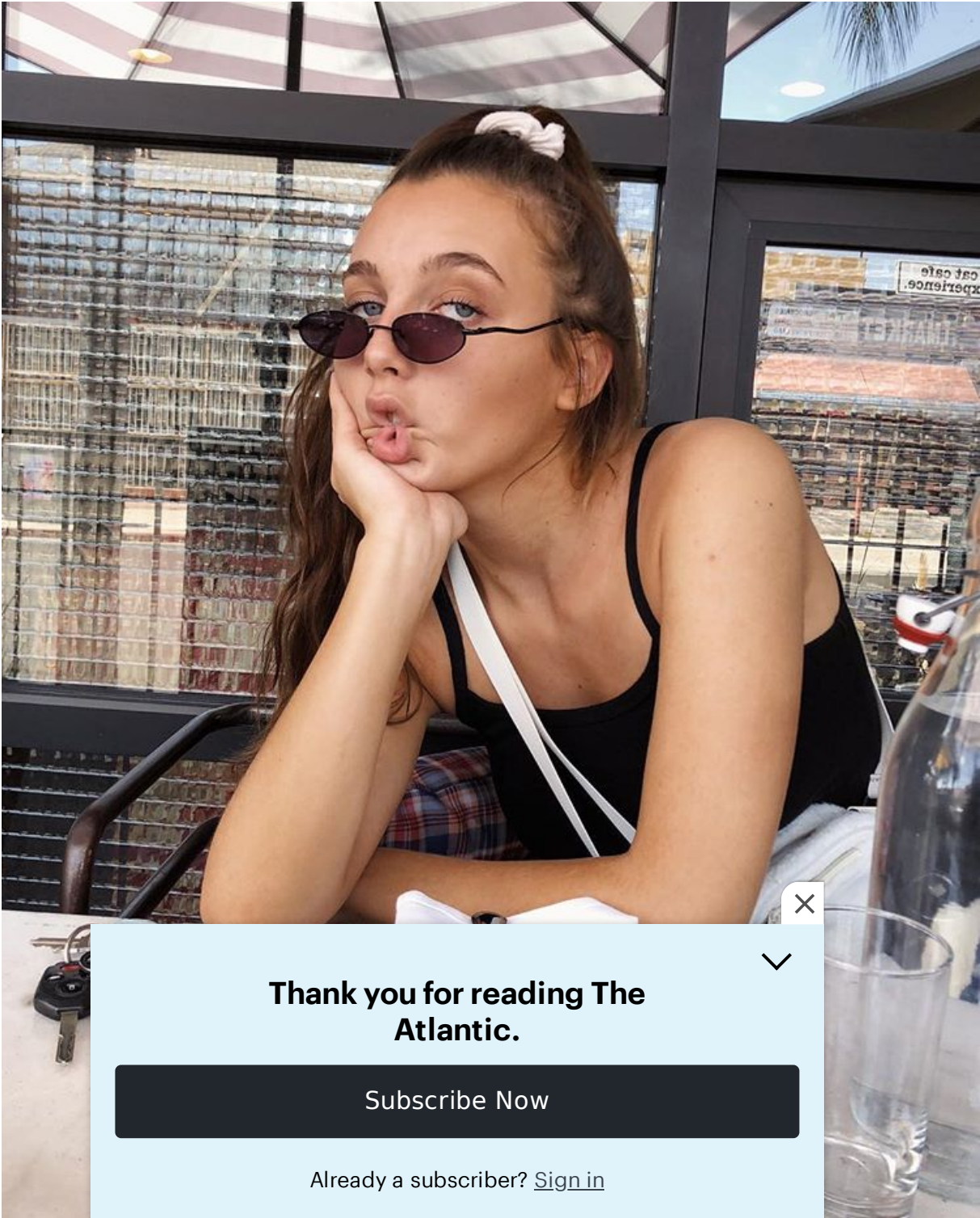
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Plus, all that perfection is a grind. “I spent so many months looking for a wall that was a certain color,” says [Sarah Peretz](#), a Los Angeles–based influencer known for her stylized, hyper-saturated feed. “There came a point in my life where all I’d be looking for was walls, walls, walls. I was like, *Guess what day it is? It’s another wall.*” After interrupting a vacation to take a picture against a roadside casino’s perfect orange wall, she decided enough was enough. She began pivoting her feed away from the traditional Instagram aesthetic and started experimenting with drone photography and more creative formats. She says wall photos had become boring to her audience anyway, who are more interested in entertaining Instagram Stories than flat photos.



emmachamberlain
9.3m followers

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1,334,654 likes

emmachamberlain

time to eat ☐

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Last year, Kristen Ruby, the president of [Ruby Media Group](#), a public-relations consulting firm, splurged on a blowout and waiting in an endless line at an Instagram museum—but now, she says, she doesn't think the pop-ups are worth it. These days, like many users, she doesn't think too much about her feed and posts more frequently on Instagram Stories. "You don't have to think about colored walls, the filter, or the people in the background in the way of your perfect candytopia photo," she says.

As the ideal Instagram look shifts, brands are, as ever, eagerly trying to catch the next wave. "For brands to seem cutting edge, they can't paint a wall and say that's what they're doing," Nord says. "That aesthetic ... is no longer viable." Cohen points to Glossier as an example of a brand that's using Instagram in a more modern way. The beauty brand shares a mix of [memes](#), [natural-looking close-ups](#), and recently, a [cute video of a sloth "just because."](#)

Ultimately, Eaton says, "people are just looking for things they can relate to." And "the pink wall and avocado toast are just not what people are stopping at anymore."



TAYLOR LORENZ *is a former staff writer at The Atlantic.*

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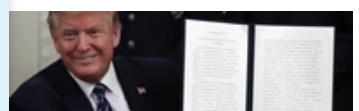
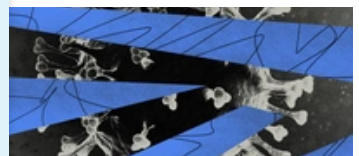
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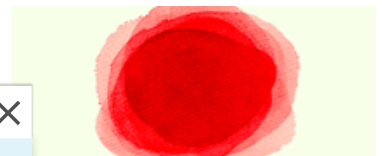
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