



FIVE TRENDS FOR 2023:
RETHINKING
EVERYTHING

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CONTENTS

10

**TREND 1:
LOSING OUR GRIP ON REALITY**

12

**TREND 2:
CALLING BS**

16

**TREND 3:
NORMALIZING SUSTAINABILITY**

20

**TREND 4:
HARNESSING THE POWER OF SOUND**

22

**TREND 5:
TAILORING OUR TINY WORLDS**



Remember when the future held the promise of better days ahead? When we anticipated shiny new conveniences, space-age advances in science, technology, and transportation, and rising economic tides capable of lifting all boats?

**What do you look
forward to now?**

**What are your hopes
for 2023 and beyond?**

We all recall how excited people were two years ago to exit 2020—the Year of Contagion and the New Abnormal. COVID-19 vaccines were in prospect, and most of us held out hope that no year could match 2020 for sheer cruelty and disruption. And then along came 2021 and 2022. Rather than fixing all that ailed us, the last two years ushered in an unrelenting onslaught of bruising news and occurrences. Skyrocketing inflation and economic uncertainty. Supply chain snarls and a global energy crisis. The continued rise of the far right and erosion of democracy. Destructive “once in a century” extreme weather events occurring with alarming frequency. Masses of misinformation and vitriol. And, on top of it all, the war in Ukraine.

Scholars will dissect for decades to come why the horrors in Ukraine spurred such global outrage when military incursions and the desperate plights of populations elsewhere have not. We cannot discount the role of [racism](#) or the impact of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's [media savvy](#). More than that, we think—at least for audiences in Europe and North America—the war in Ukraine struck deep because it reopened the prospect of genuinely global conflict, made worse by Russian President Vladimir Putin's [nuclear saber-rattling](#).



For many Europeans and most Americans at the start of this century, the horrors of war and geopolitical turbulence had become the stuff of history and folklore. For younger generations, they were blurry black-and-white images viewed on high-tech screens. Stability, security, and material abundance had become the norm for most, even as elders retained memories of the brutality and privations of the Second World War. In this context, it's no wonder the events

that marked the first two decades of this century felt aberrant. The 9/11 attacks in the U.S. were a shock to the system blamed on a few brainwashed zealots. The subsequent War on Terror was billed as getting even with the bad guys and returning things to order. The financial crisis of 2007–2008 was treated as a technical malfunction of the global financial system. Nothing that couldn't be rectified with fiscal restraint and smart policies. More recently, the rise of populist politics and politicians (e.g., Brexit, Le Pen, Meloni, Partij voor de Vrijheid, Trump, Orbán) has been attributed to voters being poorly informed or misled, with the implicit expectation that “proper order” could be restored once people had access to high-quality facts and information.

Even early in the COVID-19 pandemic, people mused about what sort of stable “new normal” would emerge. We talked about experiments with hybrid working and learning, shifts in demand for commercial and residential real estate, and the need for more robust (and localized) supply chains—but few believed the uncertainties unleashed by the pandemic would be a permanent societal fixture.

The question we now face: When we look back from the vantage point of the next decade, will the events that rocked our world at the start of this century seem aberrant? Or will they present instead as foreshocks presaging a continuing cascade of crises—all occurring against a backdrop of the ravages of climate change? At our most pessimistic, we have to consider whether the post–World War II decades of stability, security, material abundance, and the spread of democracy might have been the aberration.

As we set our sights on 2023, we see reasons to fear and reasons to hope. In the “fear” column, the trend that is farthest-reaching and most damaging (alongside climate change—the macro trend to beat all macro trends) is the

increasingly ephemeral nature of reality. The line between what is real and what is fake or only partially true is becoming ever more blurred, at times exacerbated by what feels like a growing bifurcation of humanity. Deepening divides between the rich and poor, technological haves and have-nots, and, more recently, the informed and misinformed. Bad actors intentionally spread disinformation that permeates the infosphere in an instant. What one believes increasingly depends not on what is true but on what is accepted as the truth within one's information bubble.

Perhaps it's in our nature to search for silver linings, but—despite the continued rise in polarization, extremism, and hate—we see far more trends emerging in 2023 that belong in the “hope” column. To a large extent, that is because people are fed up. They are alarmed by all that's happening in their worlds and are, at long last, prepared to fight back. One consequence is a macro trend toward a rebalancing of power. People are questioning longstanding assumptions, including the value of a university education (especially in the U.S.), the loyalty owed an employer, and the basic tenets of capitalism. Institutions and practices blindly accepted in the last century are in the spotlight now, and a growing number of people are pushing back against them for the first time.

Other trends we see on the horizon include shifts in ingrained consumer habits as people get serious about sustainability, an embrace of the power of sound, and a tailoring of tiny worlds that offer protection against our unsettled—and unsettling—times.

We have chosen to share five macro trendsightings in this report, each of which promises to impact our lives in the coming year—most, though not all, in positive ways.

**FIVE TRENDS FOR 2023:
RETHINKING EVERYTHING**



A person is shown from the chest up, wearing a white VR headset and holding two black VR controllers. They are standing inside a white, tent-like structure made of translucent fabric. The lighting is a cool, blueish-teal color. The person's face is partially obscured by the headset.

TREND 1:

LOSING OUR GRIP ON REALITY

Merriam-Webster's Word of the Year for 2022 is [gaslighting](#), defined as “the act or practice of grossly misleading someone, especially for one’s own advantage.” The danger of deepfake technology is no longer a distant fear. It’s [here](#). Agencies are hiring AI models—raising [valid questions](#) about representation and profit sharing. [Virtual influencers](#) in South Korea are attracting followers—and raking in cash. Just as we’ve begrudgingly become accustomed to AI-generated [news stories](#), along comes [podcast.ai](#), a series produced entirely by artificial intelligence. And then there’s [Replika](#), an on-demand virtual friend or intimate partner. And this is all before the [metaverse](#) becomes a real thing.

The question we will face in 2023 and beyond is straightforward: What and whom can we believe? With new technologies, it’s no longer our eyes and ears. The rise in misinformation and disinformation is so severe that the United Nations has [called on](#) member states to enact policies that support digital literacy. [DPDR](#) (depersonalization/derealization disorder) is a mental health disorder that leaves people feeling distant or detached from themselves, mentally or physically, and/or having a reduced sense of reality. A commonly prescribed treatment is talk therapy. That’s all well and good, but what happens when more providers switch to artificially intelligent [chatbot therapists](#)?

The mind boggles.



TREND 2:

CALLING BS

The world is in revolt. Not physically, for the most part (though we all know there are exceptions), but socially and culturally. Some of this can be traced to the disruptions of COVID-19 and the unexpected opportunity many of us had to slow down, contemplate, and rethink all aspects of our lives—from our jobs, lifestyles, and childrearing priorities to how we want the world around us to function. Pain points that, for the most part, had simmered just beneath the surface—including racial, economic, and gender injustices and the potentially cataclysmic threat of climate change—erupted and led many people, finally, to act. One result we have seen—and will see more of in 2023—is a pushback against the current balances of power and a rethinking of the cornerstones of modern life.

We are questioning everything.

In the work world, employees (younger ones, especially) refuse to make the sacrifices earlier generations considered standard. Long hours, underpaid or even some unpaid labor, high-stress working conditions? No thanks. Looming recession or not, this is an era of [lying flat](#), [quiet quitting](#), and calls to “[act your wage](#).” The notion that worker drones should devote their lives to pumping up the profits of corporate executives and investors is increasingly less accepted at a time when spending decades climbing the corporate ladder to grasp the golden ring (or watch) at journey’s end is no longer on offer.

In the U.S. especially, people are also questioning the value of a college degree. A [survey](#) of American parents conducted by Gallup found that 46 percent hoped their children would do something other than attend college after graduating from high school. This correlates with continued [declines](#) in college enrollment.

Now that people no longer blindly accept the traditional tenets of work and the value of higher education, they're also questioning the system these things underpin: capitalism. This economic system that took hold in Europe in the early 19th century and spread outward is now being cited as a cause of all manner of ills, from climate change and eco-destruction to economic inequities and the surge in mental health disorders. A [2020 study](#) by Pew Research found that just 4 in 10 Americans aged 18–29 hold a positive view of capitalism. Globally, a [2019 survey](#) by Edelman found that 56 percent of respondents agree that capitalism, as it exists today, does more harm than good in the world.

And even as more of the world leans toward [authoritarianism](#), people in hyperconservative cultures are rising up against rulers and systems of government whose tight grip on the populaces is now regarded as intolerable. We're seeing this in [Iran](#) and [Myanmar](#), among other places. In fact, civil unrest is on the rise globally, with U.K.-based consulting firm Verisk Maplecroft [citing](#) an increased risk in 101 of 198 countries monitored.

In 2023, we'll see more repudiation of facets of life once considered sacrosanct.

One on our radar: the pushback against car culture. The car-free movement is revving up as more people question why the



world's urban areas prioritize vehicles over pedestrians and quality of life. Signs of the times: the creation of [car-free pedestrian zones](#) in cities worldwide, new technologies to [limit car speeds](#), proposals to discourage purchases of [mega-sized vehicles](#), and the increasing popularity of [e-bikes](#) and [e-scooters](#). There's even a [War on Cars](#) podcast.

A satellite image of a large hurricane or tropical storm over the ocean. The storm has a distinct eye and spiral cloud structure. The ocean is dark blue, and some landmasses are visible at the edges.

TREND 3:

NORMALIZING SUSTAINABILITY

Public concern about climate change has reached an all-time high, according to a [GlobeScan survey](#) conducted in 17 countries, with 65 percent of respondents calling the situation “very serious.” It’s reached the point that 4 in 10 respondents to a 2022 [survey](#) conducted in 31 countries cite climate change as a deterrent to having children. That’s a big shift from just a few years ago when many people seemed inclined to dismiss concerns about our impending climate catastrophe. As extreme weather events have jolted the complacency of large swathes of the global population, what once was deemed “theoretical” or a “point of view” is now considered settled science by a majority of people. And that’s impacting how ordinary consumers make purchasing decisions, both large (homes, vehicles) and small.

We needn’t look far to spot signs that people are finally adjusting their lives to meet this global threat. Real estate portals such as [Redfin](#) and [Realtor.com](#) have begun providing climate-risk data alongside details of a home’s bedrooms and bathrooms. That makes sense at a time when three in five people [surveyed](#) say climate risks have influenced their choice of where to live.

In partnership with retailers, Japan has backed a [points system](#) that supports shoppers’ eco-friendly purchases with loyalty points that earn rewards. We’re also seeing a more significant shift toward slow fashion, with startups such as Sweden’s [Asket](#) rejecting seasonal collections in favor of a “permanent” collection that promises years of wear and other retailers creating programs—e.g., Cuyana’s [Lean Closet](#) and

Patagonia's [Worn Wear](#)—that encourage customers to return used items so they can have a second life with someone else. Eco-friendly products and services have been on offer for decades. The difference now is in their broader availability and consumer acceptance levels. U.S. [research](#) by Capterra in 2022 found, for instance, that 88 percent of consumers check the sustainability of a product prior to purchase at least sometimes, while one in five always check.

In 2023, we'll see more innovations in eco-mindfulness, including new [delivery models](#), [carbon footprint labels](#) on foods, and passive sustainability products and techniques such as "[thirsty](#)" [asphalt](#) for flood-prone areas, a new [ultra-white paint](#) that reduces the need for air conditioning, and [tiny urban forests](#) that promote biodiversity, bring down temperatures, and reduce pollution. Amid a global energy crisis and rising inflation, we'll also see more people eschew air travel in favor of overnight [buses](#) and [trains](#). According to Pinterest, [searches](#) for "train trip aesthetic" rose 205 percent in the past year.

CARBON FOOTPRINT

3.98
g CO₂e

PRODUCT
JEANS A

COLOR
BLUE

WEIGHT
873 GRAM

MATERIAL

ENERGY
1%

PACKAGING
7%

TRANSPORT
2%

TOTAL CARBON FOOTPRINT

21.45
kg CO₂e

PRODUCT
JEANS B

COLOR
BLUE

WEIGHT
873 GRAM

MATERIAL
23%

ENERGY
5%

PACKAGING
2%

TRANSPORT
70%



TREND 4:

**HARNESSING
THE POWER
OF SOUND**

Several years ago, we started seeing reports about the [impact of music](#) on people suffering from Alzheimer's disease or dementia. Now we're seeing a rise in other uses of sound, from [audio erotica](#) and [spatial audio](#) to [ASMR](#) (autonomous sensory meridian response) triggers that evoke feelings of euphoria, calm, or even tingling. Brands are producing [original sounds](#) for TikTok.

More and more, sound is seen as a potential solution to at least some of what ails modern society. [Sound baths](#) and [sound mapping](#) are prescribed to soothe the soul and reduce anxiety. More people also are turning to [brown noise](#) to induce relaxation or improve focus.

In 2023, we'll continue to explore new (and old) sound applications, including the links between voice and disease. Researchers at the National Institutes of Health are amassing voice data to [develop an AI](#) that can diagnose diseases—from neurological disorders and autism to cancer—based on a person's speech.

Sounds good to us.



TREND 5:

TAILORING OUR TINY WORLDS

The final trend we'll point to for the coming year has been taking shape since at least the 1980s when "[cocooning](#)" became a thing. People are creating increasingly tiny worlds, focusing intently on their homes, which now often double as places of work. (A new jobs benefit: [work-from-home stipends](#) to help remote workers kit out their home offices.) This is about more than getting cozy, as exemplified by the past decade's embrace of the Scandinavian concepts of [hygge](#) and [lagom](#). It's about security, self-empowerment, and self-reliance. People feel a heightened need for protection—against everything from mutating viruses and weather events to uncertain jobs markets and supply chains—and they're responding by fortifying their homes with the technology, stockpiled goods, and entertainment options they think they'll need to make it through whatever crisis comes next.

With mental health and wellness becoming more of a focus, how our homes make us feel has become nearly as important as their functionality. In the past couple of years, interior design has become a hobby, spawning a spate of [mobile and online games](#). Meanwhile, the global home décor market is [forecast](#) to grow from USD 662 billion in 2022 to nearly USD 806 billion in 2026. This includes an emerging trend of [high-end board games](#) as luxury home décor.

In our increasingly disconnected, computer-mediated world, we're also seeing a return to community associations and block parties, as people seek a sense of belonging, safety, and empowerment. In the U.S., roughly 28 percent of the population now belong to some sort of [community](#)

[association](#), be it a homeowners association, condominium community, or housing cooperative. Such associations can offer both practical support—e.g., maintenance of common areas and amenities—and the reassurance of knowing neighbors will have your back should issues arise.

In 2023, we'll see more people turning their homes into health and wellness sanctuaries. The indoor plants market is [forecast](#) to exceed USD 26 billion by 2029, up from just under USD 18 billion in 2021. More companies are producing [backyard pods](#) that can serve as meditation retreats (or just kid-free zones). And we're seeing more multisensory [experience showers](#) featuring customized water treatments, lighting, sounds, and more.

Chaos may continue to reign outside, but for the luckiest among us, it stops at the front door.

Overall, what we'll see in 2023 is a leaning in to hope and self-empowerment. As external pressures increase, we will seek to identify elements that fit seamlessly into the lives we wish to live and incorporate them into our homes and habits. By grabbing hold of and defending truth, rethinking institutions and approaches that no longer work for most, adopting lifestyles better suited to our endangered planet, harnessing the power of sound, and crafting smaller, richer, and more defensible worlds, we are injecting purpose and stability into an existence that too often feels frenzied and adrift.

**OUR BEST WISHES FOR A 2023
ON WHICH WE CAN ALL LOOK
BACK WITH GRATITUDE.**

