

FRIDA RAMSTEDT

The Interior Design Handbook

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The Interior Design Handbook

Furnish, Decorate, and Style Your Space

Illustrations by Mia Olofsson



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Introduction

A Home to Feel Good In

I have spent a lot of time searching for the book you have in your hands. And I couldn't find it. I've read hundreds of books on interior styling, searched libraries, bought old books from thrift shops, and ordered foreign titles online, but most of them have consisted largely of pictures of interiors and spectacular homes. They offered very little concrete advice for ordinary houses and apartments.

What I have been looking for is a book that clarifies the fundamental principles and skills of interior design, a book that explains the rules of thumb and tricks that are useful to all of us, irrespective of the kind of furniture or style we favor. Something that shows us how small adjustments can make a major impact on the overall impression, without our having to buy a host of new items or ripping things out and renovating.

Professional designers and architects, of course, have their practical manuals that contain guidelines and ergonomic measures as to how a house should be constructed, but I've never found anything aimed at individuals. What was needed is a book we can hold in our hands as we set about turning houses into homes, a book that will help us come up with our own solutions instead of simply encouraging us to follow other people's.

When we moved from an old apartment to an estate of newly built town houses a couple of years ago, I was faced with all the challenges of design and decor that can arise in an absolutely standard house in which everything may be practical but is also uniform and quite lacking in charm. I no longer had ten feet from floor to ceiling and the excuse of turn-of-the-century features to fall back on. I hit a brick wall and failed to achieve the warm and cozy feeling I wanted. In spite of the fact that I work full-time with design and decor and have done interiors for well-known businesses, designing my own reality was harder and a good deal more frustrating than I expected. It was a problem, but it also made me start thinking and looking at design in a new way, both professionally and personally. What was it, actually, that went into making a design cozy, harmonious, and properly thought through?

I jotted down my thoughts and considerations in a notebook and thus built up a basic outline of the handbook of interior design and styling that I had been unable to find. A handbook for ordinary people, not for experts in the field or for my professional colleagues. I did, however, start asking them questions in order to discover the way they went about thinking when faced with different situations. I attempted to decode the "gut feeling" that designers and interior stylists often refer to, and I tried to convert it into practical and useful advice.

There are not, in fact, a great many scientific facts or any absolutely right or wrong ways of going about these things—they are, after all, matters of taste and preference—but there is a good deal of expertise available, as well as accepted practice, that we can follow. But it does depend on us being aware of it. And then we can, of course, seek help when we get stuck.

My aim has been to try to gather together and write down all these tips and tricks in one place and to translate what professionals call intuition into something more concrete that both you and I can use to feel more confident about the decisions we are making. My hope is that you will look at the process of interior design and styling with new eyes after reading my book, and that by applying some of the ideas to your own spaces, you will be better able to see what is needed in order to make your home a place in which you will thrive.

Just Playing the Notes Vs. Having Perfect Pitch

I like to compare the process of interior design and styling to music. Not everyone has perfect pitch, but most people can learn to play the notes. The same thing is true of color, form, and decor. Not everyone is born with the kind of intuitive feel for the design process that makes the result seem planned, but almost everyone can become much better if they learn the fundamentals and then put their skills into practice.

There are probably more people interested in decor and design nowadays than there have ever been. Or, perhaps more accurately, we all know a great deal about furniture, gadgets, and trends and can rattle off design classics, brands, and this season's colors in our sleep, but I have a sense that we know very little about the fundamentals of design and styling—aspects like proportion, vital measurements, and practical needs. And, with all the things we buy and keep changing, we have little idea how we might go about creating a functioning, harmonious home. In spite of the fact that we spend so much money buying things for our homes and renovating them, there are amazingly few of us who feel they have achieved perfection.

This book does not contain any glossy photographs or carefully styled interiors. I don't believe we need more books of that kind. What I have tried to offer instead are instructive explanations and illustrations that will help you work out solutions for yourself that are suited specifically to your home and your circumstances.

I think it's time we started giving more consideration to *how* rather than *with what* we work on design. That's why I want to give you a toolbox of skills that will help you become more sensitive to your needs and, if you are not happy with your decor, lead you to find out for yourself what is wrong with it. Do not, however, look upon this book as some kind of research report or rule book. Think of it rather as a music book full of melodies and harmonies you can mix whichever way you like in order to compose a more harmonious and cozy home.



"Home is the nicest word there is."

Laura Ingalls Wilder



What Makes You Feel Good?

Before professional designers or stylists start work on a client's project, they carry out an analysis of needs. Since they are not choosing furniture for their own use, they have to try to form some idea of the people who will be living there. How do they live? What practical needs have to be taken into consideration, and what do the clients want to be able to do in their homes?

When we are doing the design work for ourselves, it is easy to skip this initial phase and instead go straight to the aesthetic aspects, thinking more about the way we want the result to look than about how we want it to function in terms of everyday living.

If you want to be satisfied with the result and avoid unnecessary purchases, the very best tip I can give you is to start by doing a thorough analysis. Not everyone wants or can afford to bring in a consultant, but it won't cost you a penny to start thinking like one.

Who Are You, What Do You Do in Your Home, and for Whom?

These days a home is much more than just a roof over your head. Many people identify with their homes and want them to reflect their personalities, with the help of details that signal their social status or group membership. We can see on social media, in particular, where the private sphere becomes the public sphere, and we are happy to photograph it and show it to others. We seem to be using our homes and their design to project an image of ourselves, just as we did in the past with clothes and fashion. This kind of approach, however, can easily lead to vanity, causing us to go for show rather than comfort and ease.

 ***Finding something you like yourself isn't something you can learn from other people.***

—Terence Conran

Designing your own interior is not just a matter of showing aspects of your character; it's also a way of adapting your decor to the kind of individual you are. By attempting to understand and support the physical and psychological needs of our personalities, I believe we have a greater chance of creating cozy and harmonious homes that don't only look good but also make us feel better.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be surrounded by nice things or being inspired by other people's ideas, but we must not forget that many of the most important answers can be found only in ourselves: how we feel and react in different environments, which details trigger warm and pleasant memories, what we do to make ourselves comfortable when no one else is watching. Thinking like this can provide invaluable clues as to how we can organize our houses to make them more homey for us to live in rather than for others to look at.

Design Anxiety or Sensitivity

I don't have strong colors in my home, and I often hear people say that means I must be suffering from anxiety. People seem to assume that I work with a light and neutral range of colors because I lack courage and am afraid of making mistakes. My own feeling is that environments with strong colors require too much of my energy. I think I am extremely sensitive to impressions, and because of this, I'm easily exhausted by busy interiors with many strong visual elements that all demand my attention simultaneously.

As sure as I am that surroundings with strong colors make it difficult for me to relax, I can fully understand people who feel quite the opposite—people who find that homes decorated in muted colors make them feel uneasy and understimulated. It's not a case of one way is right and the other wrong, one brave and the other fearful; rather it has to do with differing personality traits and reactions to external stimuli. In order to feel at home, we need to feel at ease both physically and mentally.

Furnish for How You Would Like to Live, Not for What You Want People to Think

In spite of the fact that we are all unique individuals, it's amazing how often we have the same basic furnishings in our homes. It doesn't make much sense: what should decide how we furnish our homes is how we want to use them. After all, our home's layout and the furniture we choose will define the kind of life we can lead (to some extent anyway). Those who like to spend a lot of leisure time with friends will presumably need a large sofa and plenty of seating in the living room, whereas those who prefer to relax with a book should probably spend their money on a really nice chair to read in. If you are outward-looking and draw energy from being with others, you will undoubtedly feel more at home with open-plan living, but if you prefer seclusion while you recharge your batteries, you will probably feel better if you have rooms with doors that can be closed behind you.

So how should you go about furnishing your home to suit your personality and the way you want to live? By analyzing when and where you feel most at home and comfortable, then working out how you can make sure that it happens more often.

Some Examples

- Are you sociable and outgoing? Optimize your home for sociability: invest in a larger dining table and make sure you have more chairs and more spaces on the sofa than there are members of the family so that you can welcome visitors without any fuss.
- Are you reserved and devote more time to your hobbies than to social events? Set up your home so that it suits you: don't waste unnecessary space on a bulky

sofa with seating for many visitors or a large dining table that is never used.

- Do you suffer from stress? Optimize your home for rest and relaxation: give the living room a focus that creates peace and calm—a crackling fire or a peaceful painting, for instance. Make it easy to unwind in your home, to read a book, listen to music, or just rest. Arrange suitable spaces that allow you to indulge in these activities.
- Do you spend too much time looking at screens? Furnish your living room in a way that encourages conversation and sociability instead. You could, for example, position two sofas facing each other, or arrange a group of armchairs around a table rather than place all the furniture facing the TV screen.
- Are you sensitive to noise? Minimize sound by choosing quiet kitchen fans, dishwashers, and other appliances. Think of the acoustics and organize things to deaden echoes and footsteps.
- Does untidiness annoy you? Minimize visual disruption by making sure you have closed storage spaces and can easily neaten up and hide everyday bits and pieces.

Children and Their Needs

Bear in mind that, like adults, children are not all the same. Children and teenagers will want different things when it comes to social activities and impressions. The fact that parents feel best when everything is a certain way does not mean that their children feel the same or that their needs will remain the same throughout their young lives.

Don't Forget to List What You Don't Like!

What we often end up doing when trying to work out what's best for us is to look at the things we like. There is, however, a little trick I use when trying to clarify the contours of my taste: I collect pictures of interiors I dislike and analyze why I dislike them. By having two folders—one green and the other red—what I am attracted to and what I would rather avoid becomes much clearer. It can often be just as helpful to consider why you don't like one interior as to think about why you are attracted to another. This kind of parallel thinking about likes and dislikes can teach you a good deal about your own taste and your intuitive feel for style.

Things to Think About

- Think back to your childhood. Do you have positive memories of any particular type of interior or style? If so, try to describe the room or space.
- When do you feel best? Why?
- What image do you have of how you would like to live in the future?
- Which colors do you like? Which colors don't you like?
- Do you like older, classic styles of furniture, or are you more attracted to newer and more modern designs? Do you prefer urban furnishings, or are you happier with a more rustic environment? Try to define the surroundings in which you feel most at home.
- What kind of wood and what kind of finish do you like best: light, dark, treated, varnished, painted?
- Which is your favorite furniture store and why?
- Do you have a favorite hotel or restaurant in which you really feel comfortable? Why?
- What is your budget? What do you think is a sensible amount to spend on furniture and decor for a room or project you are about to undertake?

Put your thoughts on paper and think about them yourself or discuss them with someone who knows you well. If you have a friend who is also starting a home project, you can help each other by exchanging thoughts and ideas about your design histories.

2

Basic Principles and Rules of Thumb

This chapter may be the most demanding in the book, but it's important. What I'm trying to do here is to summarize and simplify some of the basic principles that designers, architects, and photographers often refer to and make use of in their work. If you hold these in the back of your mind as you read the rest of this book, you will find it much easier to see how you can use specific styling tips and to understand what they are based on.

The Mathematics of Design

Numbers have never been my strong suit. I prefer color and form, which is why it's quite amusing (and unexpected) that mathematical thinking has often saved me when I've come up against a wall in my creative work.

When you ask professional designers and stylists what they consider when setting about their work, a surprising number of them tell you that they work on "gut feeling." To the inquiring amateur, that is a frustrating answer—about as helpful as a chef telling those just learning to cook that they need to improvise more. Those of us not born with an innate talent in a field would prefer to be given some specific advice to follow.

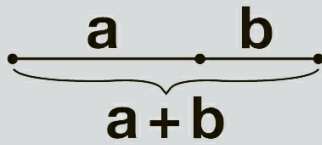
While there aren't any universal recipes or keys to successful interior design and style, the more we learn about historical methods of creating harmonious compositions and proportions, the more we will have to go on when developing our own taste and thinking. This is where mathematics comes in: what some people can see intuitively, others can learn to calculate.

The Golden Ratio

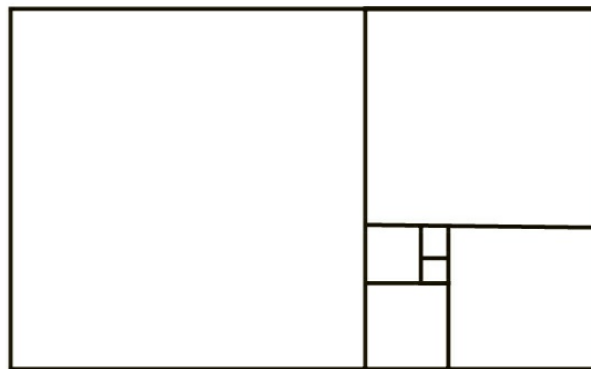
The golden ratio, also known as phi (the Greek letter Φ) or the golden mean, is a good concept to know if you are interested in design. It's a mathematical formula that has been used to calculate harmonious proportions and composition in art, architecture, and music ever since ancient times. The twelfth-century Italian mathematician Fibonacci and ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras are often said to be the first people to define the golden ratio, and it's had a long and checkered history since. Irrespective of what you may know or think of it as an ideal, there can be no doubt that it has informed our view of beauty throughout the ages.

You don't need to reach for a pocket calculator in order to use the golden ratio in your design, since the theory of the golden ratio and divine proportions includes certain geometrical shapes, such as the golden rectangle, the golden spiral, and the golden triangle. This is where this approach really comes into its own for those of us who are not keen on numbers. By working with the shapes of the golden ratio rather than with formulas, we have something to ground us as we navigate our way toward what feels right for us as individuals.

In mathematical terms, the golden ratio can be described as the ratio that exists when a line is divided into a longer part, a , and a shorter part, b , so that $a + b$ is to a , as a is to b . To put it in simpler terms, this means that if we divide the whole length by the longer part we will get the same number as if we divide the longer length by the shorter length. The value of the golden ratio is 1.618. Examples of this are to be found in everything from nature to art, buildings, galaxies, and even the human body.



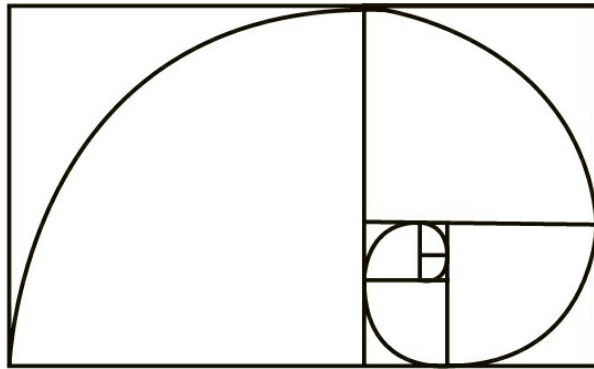
$$\frac{a + b}{a} = \frac{a}{b} = \phi \approx 1.61803$$



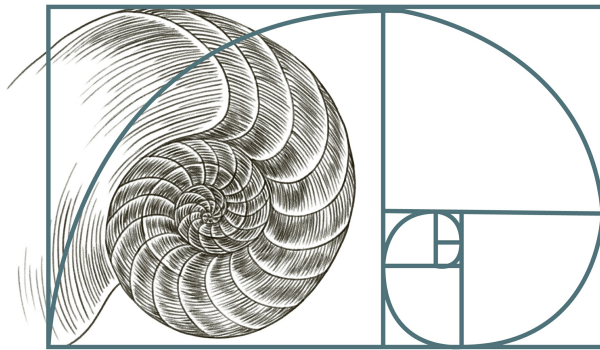
Golden rectangle



Examples of the golden ratio are found in architecture.



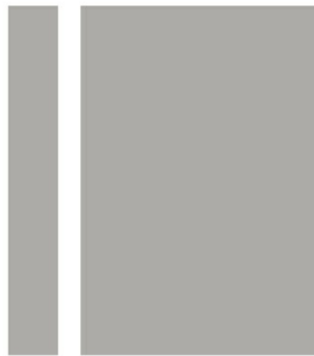
Golden spiral



Examples of the golden ratio are found in nature.



Equal proportion



Unequal proportion

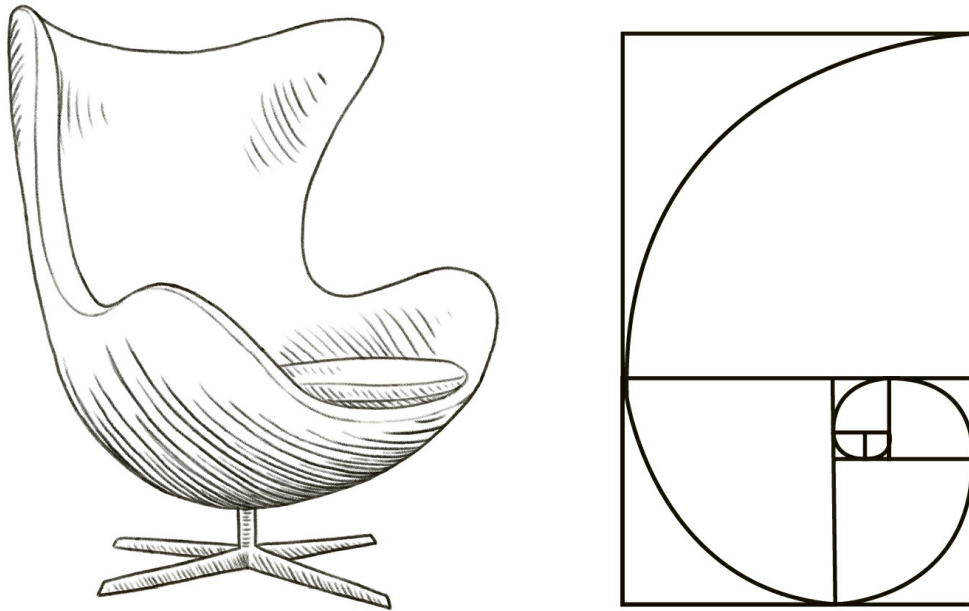


Golden ratio

Composition and Proportion

The proportions of the golden ratio have guided architects and designers throughout history and can also be useful to the amateur in need of help when deciding issues in a design project.

By aiming at Fibonacci's spiral form, it is possible to create exciting dynamism in our aesthetic arrangements of inanimate objects or still lifes. Designers often group objects in order to catch the eye or reinforce the style and mood of an interior, and many designers use the golden ratio as an aid when calculating the proportions of colors to be used in a room according to the 60/30/10+S rule. (This is described in more detail in chapter 4, [this page](#).) It is not a model that has to be followed in every last respect, but if you look closely at photographs, you'll see that it's always there in one way or another.

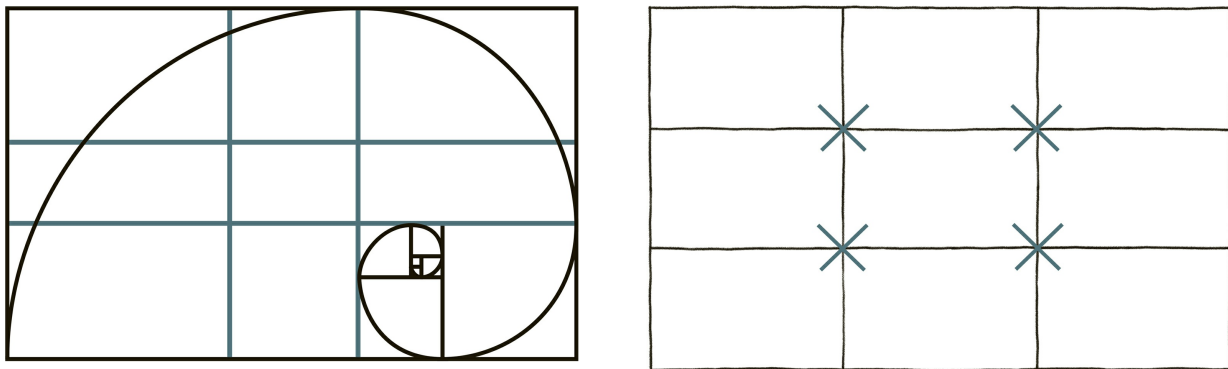


In many classic furniture designs, the lines and proportions can be traced back to the golden ratio or to the golden spiral.

The Rule of Thirds

If the formulas above seem too complicated, it may be enough just to divide your spaces into thirds rather than into halves. This provides a simplified approximation of the proportions of the golden ratio and will help you quickly work out the optimal positioning of an object. (The rule of thirds is sometimes known as golden balance.) Since this rule is more pragmatic and less mathematically complicated than an exact golden ratio, it is easier to apply in everyday design work.

To understand the thinking behind this, you can compare it with the small, fine grid marked on the screen of many modern digital cameras that help you position the objects in your photograph. The grid derives from the golden ratio and the simpler rule of thirds: it divides your photograph into three segments both horizontally and vertically. The idea of the grid is that you should position your main motif (for example, the person you are photographing) on one of the points where the lines intersect rather than in the middle of the grid, which will improve the composition of the photograph. By using the grid we can quickly see the intersections and thus avoid the classic mistake of centering an object.



Digital cameras often have a grid that shows up in the viewfinder. It not only helps you keep the camera straight but also shows you how to compose the picture to ensure that focus falls on one of the intersections of the lines of the golden ratio (the phi grid) or of the rule of thirds.

If we study well-known pictures or films, or if we look at the composition of news items on TV, for instance, we can see that cameramen and photographers across the world frequently work according to this principle. It is very rare for the main subject to be positioned in the absolute center of the picture—it is usually positioned one- or two-thirds in from the edge, with the golden spiral as its starting point. In a similar way, we can decode interior designs and styles that catch our eye, since they very often have a composition that can be traced back to the same approach. By keeping this in mind, we can recognize quickly where and how to position furniture and interior design accessories in order to achieve a harmonious balance in the home.

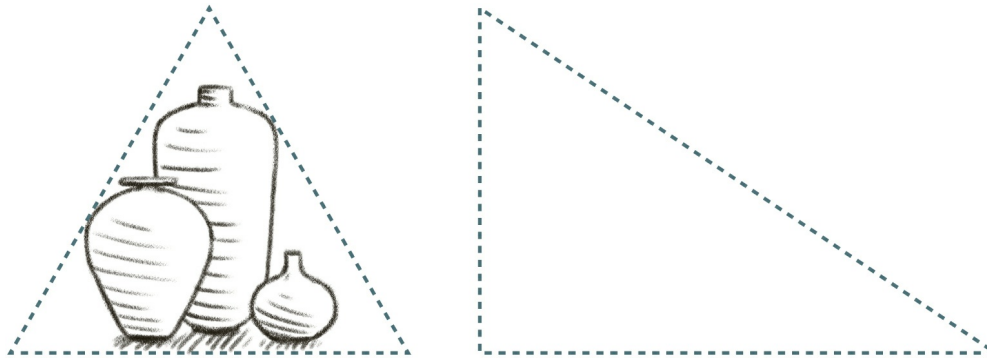
So the rule of thirds can help with design and give you pointers as to where to position significant objects in a room or on a wall. By dividing the interiors or surfaces you are working with into thirds rather than into halves, you will find that you can create balance and harmony for the eye.

“Geometry has two great treasures: one is the theorem of Pythagoras; the other, the division of a line into extreme and mean ratio.”

–Johannes Kepler

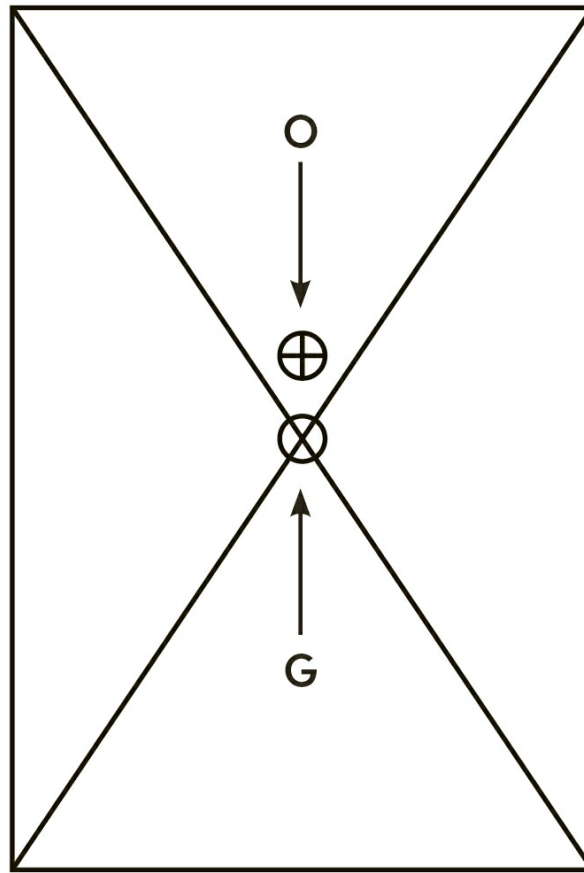
Triangles and Three-Point Thinking

Once you start detecting and analyzing visual triangles in interior design illustrations, you will find them everywhere—enough to make your head spin! Designers, stylists, and photographers frequently use triangles, or what is called three-point thinking, in their work: it is not complicated to do, and it often leads to excellent results, so it's a useful technique for amateurs to imitate. The idea is to position objects in such a way that their outline forms a triangle. The system works with both equilateral triangles and with right triangles.



The Optical Midpoint

According to the theory of the golden ratio, centering an object is not always optimal. The concept of the optical midpoint, which is often used in graphic design, arises from the same thinking: the perceived optical midpoint and the geometric midpoint can be different. The optical center lies about 10 percent above the geometric center. This explains, for instance, why the focal point of an advertisement is not usually at the geometric center, and more space is left in the lower part than in the upper part. Similarly, the bottom part of the mounts in picture frames are often wider than the top parts so that the image sits slightly above the geometric midpoint.



The optical midpoint (O) is the point that the eye is said to perceive as the actual midpoint. It lies immediately above the geometric midpoint (G), at a height similar to the golden ratio.

Focal Points

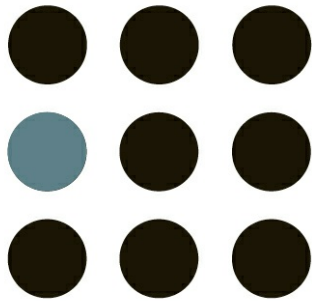
Most of us who are used to taking photographs naturally recognize that we should focus on an element. We select something in the image to act as the focal point, and we do so by allowing that particular feature to take up a little more space or to attract the attention of the eye. But in the physical world, we frequently forget to keep this in mind, particularly when we are having trouble with an interior design project.

A very common mistake in interior design is allowing all the furniture and decor to make equal demands on our attention—or, of course, the reverse. The idea of a focal point is a way of getting around this problem. What is the first thing you notice in a room you are in the process of designing? What do you want the first thing to be? Is it the same in both cases, or do you need to guide the eye where you want it to go?

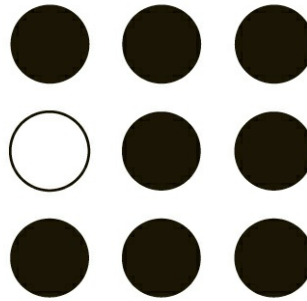
Rooms sometimes have a natural focal point—a beautiful view, a large window, or a fine fireplace that catches the attention. In that case, the problem might be that your design conflicts with the visual path the eye follows naturally. Other times there may be no particular focus, or there may be too many things all demanding attention at the same time. In such situations, you need to work at the design in order to come up with a focal point that best projects the room, the house, or the feeling you want to create.

The next time you are sketching out an interior design, give this a try. Think about what you want to highlight and what you want to tone down. If you have worked too long on a room and can no longer see the forest for the trees, it is useful to ask someone else what they notice first. Or take some photos with your phone; by looking at and assessing your surroundings through the lens of a camera, you will soon see what the eye is automatically drawn to and what you need to adjust in order to make your chosen focal point emerge more clearly. It may be that there is something that needs moving or grouping or quite simply removing.

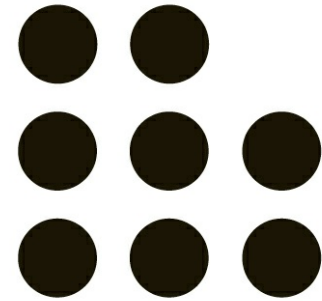
Color



Contrast



Placement



Which of the dots in these clusters draws your eye? Variations in color, contrast, and placement tend to stand out and attract our attention. This is worth remembering when you are planning designs and want a particular focal point to draw attention.

Magic Tricks with Lines

When working on interior design and style, lines are one of the most powerful visual tools at your disposal. By using the lines in a room, in pieces of furniture, on the wallpaper or textiles, you can create optical illusions that trick the eye and have the effect of enlarging or shrinking, emphasizing or minimizing. So when planning your home and trying to work out where to position things, it is important to think how the lines run.

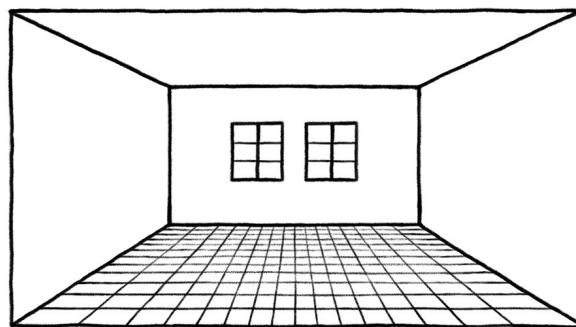
Leading Lines

Interior designers often use the term *leading lines*. What they are referring to is the use of lines to lead the eye to the place or the object they want the eye to focus on. When photographers are composing a picture and deciding where the object is to be positioned in the photograph, they often use natural lines in the surrounding environment to create a feeling of depth and direction. An interior designer or stylist can work in the same way to achieve depth in the design.

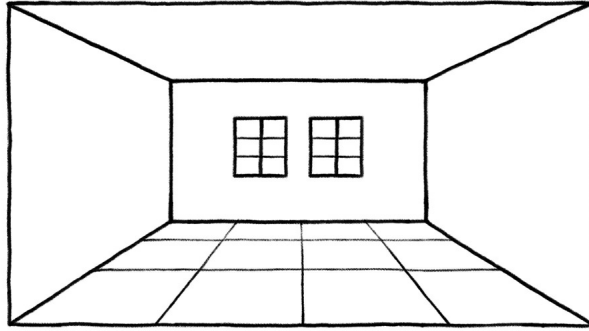
Some lines already exist in a building—the walls, the floor, the moldings—but others we create for ourselves depending on the interior decor we choose—furniture, for instance, and rugs. Even light and shadow can create strong lines depending on where they fall during the day. We can also use empty spaces, such as the gaps and spaces between pieces of furniture and other items to direct the gaze in a particular direction. And we can consciously group objects in various formations so that they emphasize a line.

Diagonal Lines

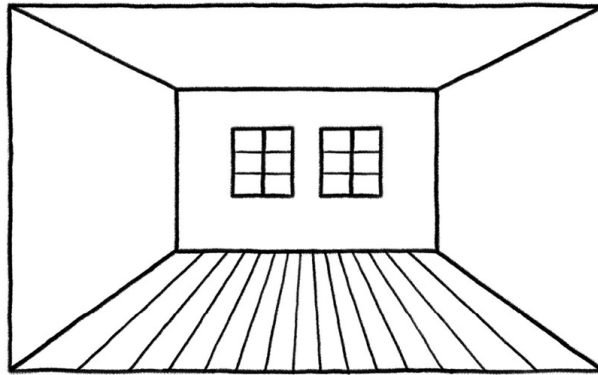
Interior designers who use the golden ratio often mention the importance of creating diagonal lines, that is, the lines that emerge at an angle from the triangular concept and lead the eye obliquely upward or downward. We can see this at work when picture frames or the decorative accessories of a still life are grouped in such a way that the outline forms an imaginary line that leads the eye of the observer to the focal point.



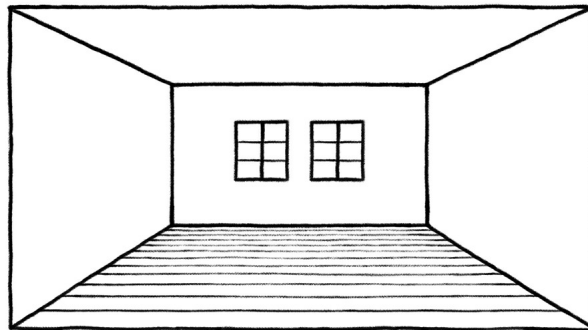
Floors with small squares (many broken lines) make rooms feel more sociable.



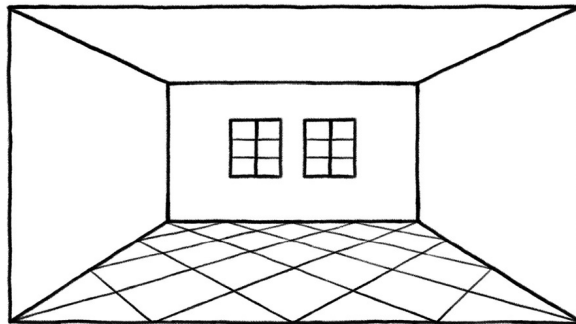
Floors with large squares (fewer lines) tend to emphasize the size of the room.



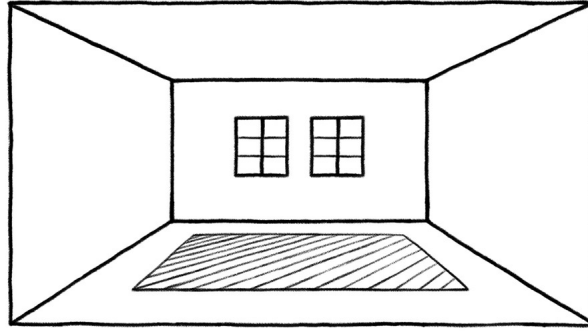
Floors with stripes running lengthwise can make a room seem longer and narrower.



Floors with stripes running crosswise can make a room seem wider.



Tiles in a diagonal layout tend to open out and widen a room.



Can't change the floor? Choose a rug with lines that create the desired effect.

Horizontal Lines

We can make a room feel wider by creating or emphasizing horizontal lines. In narrow spaces, this can be a good method of playing tricks on the eye: wallpaper with horizontal stripes or the choice of furniture can achieve this effect. For instance, if you choose bookcases with long, unbroken, horizontal shelves instead of those divided into sections or squares, you will create leading lines rather than a checkered effect. The direction of the pattern on a rug can have this effect, too. In a similar way, paneling can minimize the feeling that the ceiling is too high and can make a room feel more intimate.

Vertical Lines

The eye can be drawn upward by emphasizing the vertical lines in a room with, for instance, the use of wallpaper or details such as tall, narrow sections of shelving that run from floor to ceiling. This tricks the eye into assuming that the height of the ceiling is greater than it is in reality.

Curved Lines

Interior design also needs gentle, rounded lines if it is to avoid seeming sharp and angular. Certain features of the building itself, such as vaulted ceilings and arched windows or walls, can provide these lines. This effect can also be achieved by introducing items like circular rugs and furniture and mirrors in arched shapes.

Lines on the Floor

The floor provides another example of leading lines. The spaces and joints in parquet flooring, floorboards, earthenware tiles, and wooden tiles can influence how we perceive a room and its size. It's worth bearing all this in mind when weighing the alternatives.

Visual Weight

Physical weight deals in pounds and ounces, whereas visual weight is all about how something is perceived by the eye. You frequently hear comments suggesting that design needs a heavy point or that styling for summer should be light. What do we really mean by this, and what appears heavy or light to the eye?

Here are some examples of what interior designers and stylists usually refer to as heavy or light:

Heavy

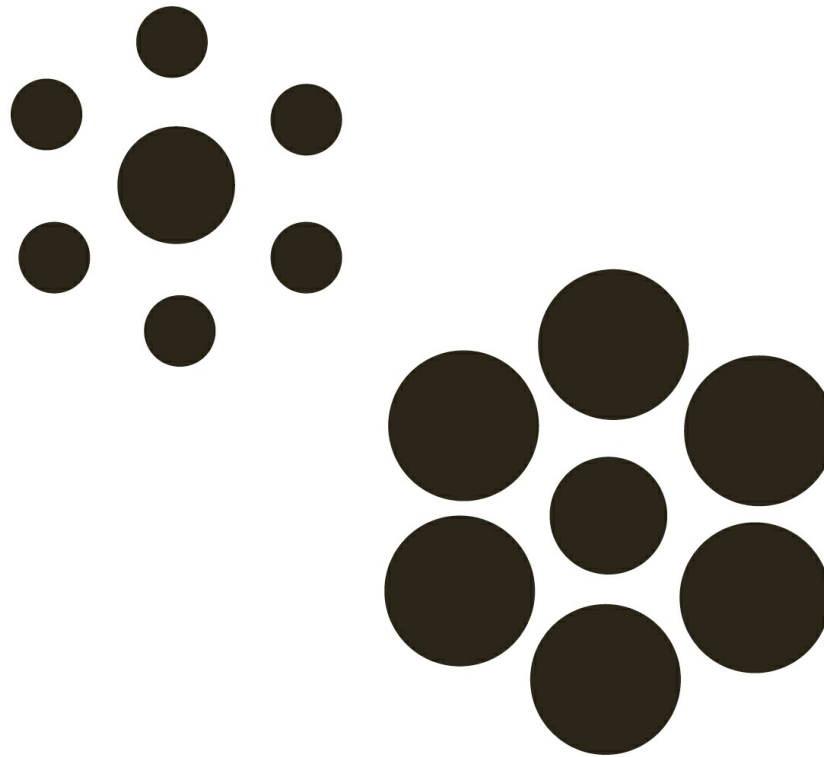
- Larger objects
- Dark colors
- Strong contrasts
- Warm shades
- Objects in corners or on the edge
- Diagonal lines
- Complex shapes

Light

- Smaller objects
- Light colors
- Mild contrasts
- Cold shades
- Objects close to the center
- Horizontal lines
- Simple shapes

Like leading lines, visual weight is something we can consciously use to emphasize a focal point in a room and draw the eye where we desire. If we want to create a focal point in a room that has light colors, the eye will probably be drawn to a darker object. And, for instance, if we have many similar objects in a still life, we can focus on a chosen element by placing it at the outer edge.

Those who believe that things can have different visual weights also claim that it is possible to deceive the eye and compensate for problematic spaces by incorporating the opposite effect. I don't know whether there is any science to this, but it doesn't sound unreasonable that choosing bigger and visually heavier furniture can overcome an empty, echoing feeling, and that details with high density create a different feeling in a large open space compared with the effect created by light fabrics and see-through furniture (pieces made of acrylic as well as those with legs not covered by fabric).



Optical illusion. Do the circles in the center appear to be different sizes? They're the same. Two identical objects can appear different, depending on the size of the objects surrounding them.

If you live in a small, rather confined place, you can work against the sense of constriction by choosing airy fabrics and furniture that looks lightweight, irrespective of what it may actually weigh.

It is also the case that, if your surroundings are cramped, you can deceive the eye with a lighter decor with cooler colors and simpler shapes; the resulting effect is much less heavy and clumsy than a space that is dark and full of detail.

Anchoring

If you feel that the balance in a room or in a still life is not quite right, it might be worth considering how you have anchored the furnishings or objects. *Anchoring* means that every room or still life should have a visual center of gravity. Anchoring should not, however, be confused with the concept of the focal point.

The anchor point in a room is not necessarily the first thing noticed in the design or line of sight; it should instead function to create calm and weight so that the observer's attention can move to the precise spot you want it to. Let me give you an example: A large room in which there are many visual elements usually needs a largish rug to link all the furniture and calm the room. A substantial rug on the floor prevents the interior design from drifting around and provides a proper foundation, so that attention is not diverted from the chosen focal point, which is perhaps a picture or a lamp. Thanks to the rug—the visual anchor—the other furnishings of the room feel harmonious and connected, and the focal point can receive the attention it deserves.

So, analyze your interior design bearing this in mind. Do all the pieces of furniture in the room have roughly the same weight, or is there an obvious anchor piece in every room? In certain rooms the anchor piece occurs more naturally: in the kitchen it is probably the dining table; in the living room, the sofa perhaps; in the bedroom, probably the bed. But even in rooms in which there is no natural weight, the question is still worth asking. Perhaps the hall needs a solid chest of drawers; the study might need a substantial bookcase; the bathroom, a decent chest of drawers. These things provide a solid foundation for our sensory perceptions, allowing the smaller items to float more calmly on the surface.

A still life that is rich in detail might also need a clear center of gravity, such as a large vase or something else perceived visually as heavy, positioned in the lower part of the composition. The same is true of a bookcase, of course, which feels calmer and more harmonious when the largest books are placed on the bottom shelf.



When choosing the colors for a room, a better balance is achieved if you follow the way nature uses colors—heavier shades at the bottom and lighter shades higher up. The base should have dark colors (the earth), and the colors become lighter toward the ceiling (the sky).

The Odd-Numbers Rule

Much interior design work and styling is about creating balance, but in the case of decorations, the rule of thumb suggests that the opposite holds true and odd numbers are more interesting. Some people claim that the brain prefers to deal with objects in pairs and that failing to provide pairs works against that preference; others, however, feel that the rule of three creates something more eye-catching in that the third object forms a natural center between the other two.

Whichever of those views is true, there is no doubt that the odd-numbers rule is particularly popular among interior designers. It is very frequently followed in photography and architecture, and it is possible to apply it everywhere, from how you organize the furniture to how you group your still lifes. Known sometimes as “the rule of three,” it really just boils down to an avoidance of even numbers. So, group your things in threes, fives, or sevens, and the compositions will often be more interesting. It’s certainly worth giving it a try!

Contrast and Juxtaposition

Many interior designers say that the contrasts in a design are what make it successful and the absence of them gives a room a flat and predictable feel. Including contrasting effects is also one of the best ways to add more character to a design; incorporating a few contrasts has an immediate effect. But how do we do it?

One approach is to consciously place objects in juxtaposition; that is, position two contrasting objects, pieces of furniture, or styles side by side so that the differences between them stand out and are emphasized. In interior design terms, this can be achieved by mixing different surfaces, such as gloss and matte, or different interior styles, such as rustic and modern, in the same room.

Create your contrast by considering what is the diametric opposite of an object or surface.

Using Styles to Balance Opposites

As well as making use of opposites in terms of materials and surfaces, it is possible to bring two diametrically opposite styles into juxtaposition with each other so that they clarify and emphasize their contrasts. If you consciously choose a markedly different style for reasons of contrast rather than simply choosing what people might expect given the type and character of the house, the opposites will enhance and reinforce one another. An antique bureau alongside a modern armchair will bring out the character of each in a very different way than if you place two contemporary pieces together. The juxtaposition of two interior styles can also be used to calm a turn-of-the-century house in which the woodwork is too exuberant, or to bring warmth to an angular, newly built structure that lacks natural charm.

Examples of Opposites in Interior Design

Hard	Soft
Straight	Curved
Angular	Rounded
Dark	Light
Stiff	Supple
Matte	Glossy
Large	Small
Compact	Perforated, light
Single color	Patterned
Warm	Cold
High	Low
Textured	Smooth

One little trick to create a pleasing clash between different periods is to find the common denominator. It may be a color or it may be a fabric. Ten nonmatching chairs around a table will seem more similar if all of them are black or made of the same kind of wood.

When you experiment with this type of contrast, however, make sure you do so only with items of furniture. If you remove historic parts of the structure itself, you may reduce the value of the house, and if your house is legally protected because of its historical or architectural importance, you may not be allowed to change structural details or to add extensions—but you can, of course, refurnish and repaper to your heart’s content.

It’s said that we notice the distinction between light and dark more clearly than any other difference. This is worth remembering if you are thinking about painting your walls a darker color. If you keep all the white light switches, plugs, and outlets, you will start noticing how much more they stand out than when they looked against a light background.

Textures and Tactile Surfaces

Few people would disagree that colors and shapes influence the way we experience a room. What many people don’t recognize, however, is that the choice of surface and structure is at least as important in the creation of the overall experience.

You can get away with using different shades and nuances of one color in a room, but you can rarely get away with using one and the same surface everywhere. Because of low price and easy availability, the virtual explosion in the sale of furniture constructed of medium-density fiberboard (MDF) and chipboard has democratized interior styling, but it has also contributed to the flat, harsh feeling of many modern homes, especially those that lack other surfaces and structures to provide variety. If you sense that a room is lifeless, this may well be one of the reasons.

Always try to mix a number of surface types. Combine tight, sealed materials with more natural surfaces and with materials that are soft, fluffy, raggedy, shiny, ruffled, woven, pleated, or rustic.

We usually distinguish between two sorts of texture: tactile and visual.

Tactile Texture (Physical)

This can be picked out even with your eyes closed, since the surface is physically uneven. Imagine the feeling you get when you run your hand over a woolly sheepskin or walk barefoot across a soft long-pile carpet. The Swedish-based neurodesigner (who focuses on the relationship between neuroscience and interior design) Isabelle Sjövall thinks there is a physiological explanation as to why we like tactile materials—think of snuggling under a soft blanket or sleeping between quality sheets. It stimulates the hormone oxytocin, which makes us feel calm and peaceful.

Visual Texture (Optical)

We experience this only with our eyes. For example, a photograph of an irregular surface that gives the illusion of being three-dimensional, even though it is actually flat.

The light in a room influences our visual experience of tactile material. If the surface is uneven, the shadows on it will change depending on how the exterior is lit. In a room that has many different tactile surfaces, extra life is created because the form and feel of the room change according to daylight and other lighting sources.

Rough and Uneven Surfaces

- Surfaces that reflect less light make colors feel darker.
- If there are many textured surfaces, a room will feel softer and warmer.
- Rough surfaces often feel more rustic.

Smooth and Shiny Surfaces

- Surfaces that shine and reflect make colors feel lighter.
- A room with many shiny surfaces will feel harder and colder.
- Shiny surfaces often feel more modern.

Examples of Textures in Interior Design

Working with texture contrasts is a useful technique when you want to create a sense of depth in a room. If you experience a room as flat and heavy, it's a good idea to look at how many different tactile surfaces there are; perhaps you need to introduce more variation. Try adding some of the following elements:

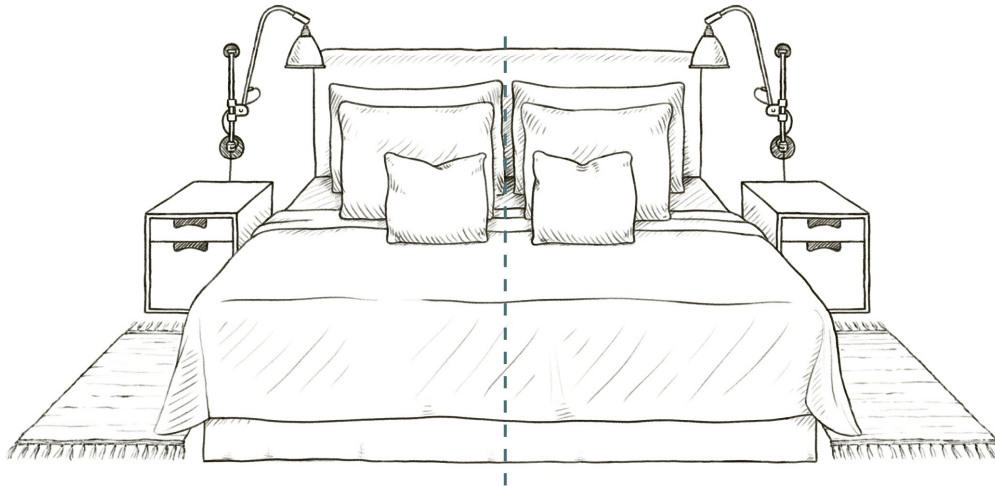
- A rug with a distinct structure—deep pile, for instance
- A sheepskin
- Linen curtains with natural creases
- A soft, fluffy blanket or throw
- A woven fabric with natural structure, such as unironed pure linen
- A glass vase with relief (such as pressed or rippled glass)
- Hand-thrown pottery
- A piece of furniture or accessory of untreated wood in which the grain is visible

A large rug of coarse texture has much more impact on a room than a small cushion of the same material. Surface area is very important in determining the impact of an object.

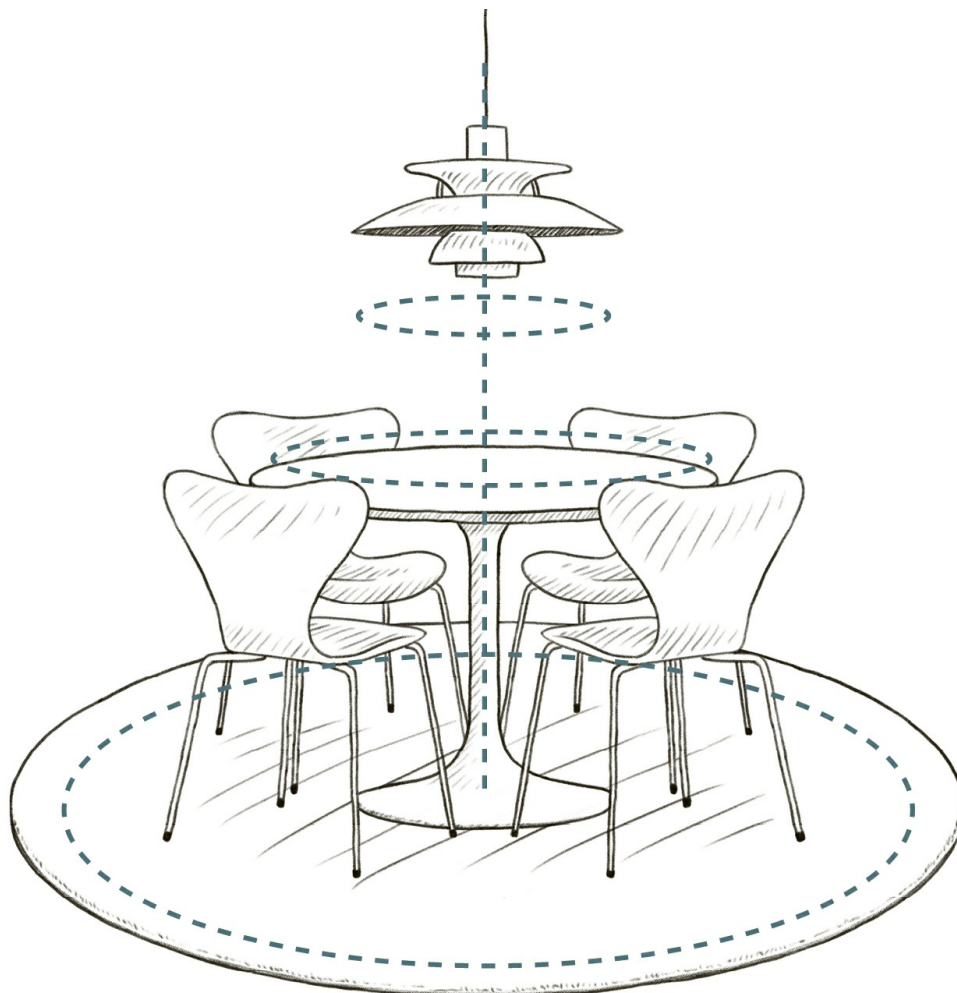
Symmetry

A simple definition of symmetry is that it is a whole with two parts in which the parts are mirror images of each other. There are, however, many other definitions that can be useful to a designer who wants to create balance by means of “twoness,” or symmetrical repetitions in a room.

- *Mirror symmetry*: Each side is a mirror image of the other—like butterfly wings, for instance. Designers often use symmetrical balance in bedrooms, where they place identical bedside tables and lamps on each side of the bed. Mirror symmetry can be both vertical and horizontal.
- *Rotation symmetry*: This is a pattern that remains unchanged when rotated around its midpoint—a star or the repeated pattern on a circular rug, for instance. Designers often talk of striving for “radial balance” when using circular furnishings in their design. This idea is based on a central point or axis, as we can see, for example, in the combination of a circular table with a circular lamp and a circular rug: if the lines of the design were broken by a rectangular rug or a long, slim lamp, our perception of the design would change depending on the direction from which we approached it.
- *Translation symmetry*: This is sometimes called parallel symmetry, and it occurs when the same figure or pattern is repeated at a set distance. We can see examples of this in avenues of trees, the borders on wallpaper, chessboard floors, or tiled walls.



Mirror symmetry. Many interior designers use mirror symmetry in bedrooms by positioning identical bedside tables and lamps on each side of the bed. This creates harmonious balance and calm in the room.



Radial balance. A round table often goes best with a round light. This is probably because of rotational symmetry around a central axis that results in a composition that looks the same from every angle.

Symmetrical compositions are helpful for bringing order into irregular designs or for adding a touch of grandeur and elegance. Pairs of lamps, pillows, candlesticks, chairs, and lamps in the window are common features of more conservative and elegant interior design, but they can also be used to bring calm to a very eclectic

design that has an abundance of detail and stimuli.

Asymmetry, Wabi Sabi, and Fukinsei

We in the West have had to learn to use symmetry to achieve balance, whereas many Asian cultures have had to do the opposite: there the balance of a composition is controlled by means of asymmetry and irregularity.

Wabi sabi is a Japanese aesthetic and interior design concept that sees beauty in what is simple and unaffected. It pays tribute to imperfection and encourages us to wonder at the whole cycle, from growth to decay.



Fukinsei is one of the seven basic principles of Zen, a branch of Buddhism, and it means asymmetry of irregularity—it's also referred to as asymmetric balance. To make conscious use of imperfection in combination with straight lines and perfect surfaces can be an effective approach when planning the interior design of a newly built residence that feels a little too polished. If you do the interior design for this kind of house and use only symmetrical and perfect furniture or mathematical patterns on the wallpaper, you are likely to reinforce the effect—what is straight will become straighter and what is hard, harder. If you decide instead to introduce imperfection by bringing in naturally irregular elements, organic shapes, or asymmetrical patterns, a completely different effect will be achieved.

I think this approach can remedy surroundings whose perfection has become alienating. Breaking a strict interior design by bringing in furniture with a patina of age can signal a more relaxed, inclusive, and welcoming atmosphere. It produces a very different feeling than furniture you don't dare sit on or use for fear of wear and tear.

Practical Examples

Here are a few examples of asymmetry and irregularity introduced into interior design. They may help you to come up with similar ideas.

- Make use of natural elements—pretty rocks and branches—and furniture with rough surfaces or irregularities.
- Add variety by using irregular forms, such as handmade pottery or other handcrafted work.
- Include materials with naturally irregular structure or patterns, such as marble or limestone.
- Choose a carpet or rug with deep pile that has natural life or a rug with an irregular pattern.
- Choose asymmetrical and organic wallpaper or fabric patterns—the opposite of repeated and regular patterns.
- Choose paintings that show traces of the movement of the hand. A drawing with sweeping strokes or an oil painting you've done yourself can offer an exciting contrast to perfect prints.
- Hang your pictures in irregular patterns rather than in symmetrical shapes.

Vary the Size and Scale

One of the most common mistakes I see in the context of interior design is that we are far too reluctant to vary scale and proportion. It's self-evident when you think about it: a regiment of identical pillows, lamps, and bowls of the same size lacks dynamism. At best it is monotonous and repetitious; at worst, stiff, stale, and uncomfortable.

Most homes are improved by details that stand out from the rest, which doesn't mean they have to be irregular, bold, or daring. It can often be quite sufficient to adjust the proportions of what is already being used. Think in terms of something tall, something short, something broad, something narrow, something big, something small. Vary the size of the pillows on the sofa—use three different sizes instead of having everything measure 20 by 20 inches (50 by 50 cm). Buy a really large and striking pot, or put a much larger plant on the floor so that it stands out from all the other potted plants. Or hang an unexpected little picture. Small adjustments can have a major impact on the overall impression.

Plan Your Empty Spaces

When styling a room, it's easy to sketch in only the areas you want to fill with things, but it is just as important to plan what is sometimes known as *negative space*, that is, planned emptiness. This means the floor and wall surfaces not occupied by furniture or accessories, the empty spaces and passages that your home needs.

When starting a project, it is important to have a conscious plan of which parts of the room need to remain clear and airy if you want to create a pleasant overall feel. Just as a piece of music has calm passages, an interior design must also have parts that serve as a transition between different rhythms so that the overall impression is neither too stressful nor too monotonously static. Negative space contributes as much to the overall experience as furnished space does.

Even if you favor intensity and enjoy having a host of things around you, empty spaces are still necessary in order to create a change of tempo. Give some thought to it. What is your home like? Is there anything you need to work at, grouping things, perhaps, rather than spreading them out? Are there parts that would benefit from some lightening up?

The empty spaces in your home, and where you choose to locate them, are not, perhaps, the first thing you consider when thinking about your interior design, but they can actually determine whether you succeed in creating a harmonious overall atmosphere with just the right amount of excitement.

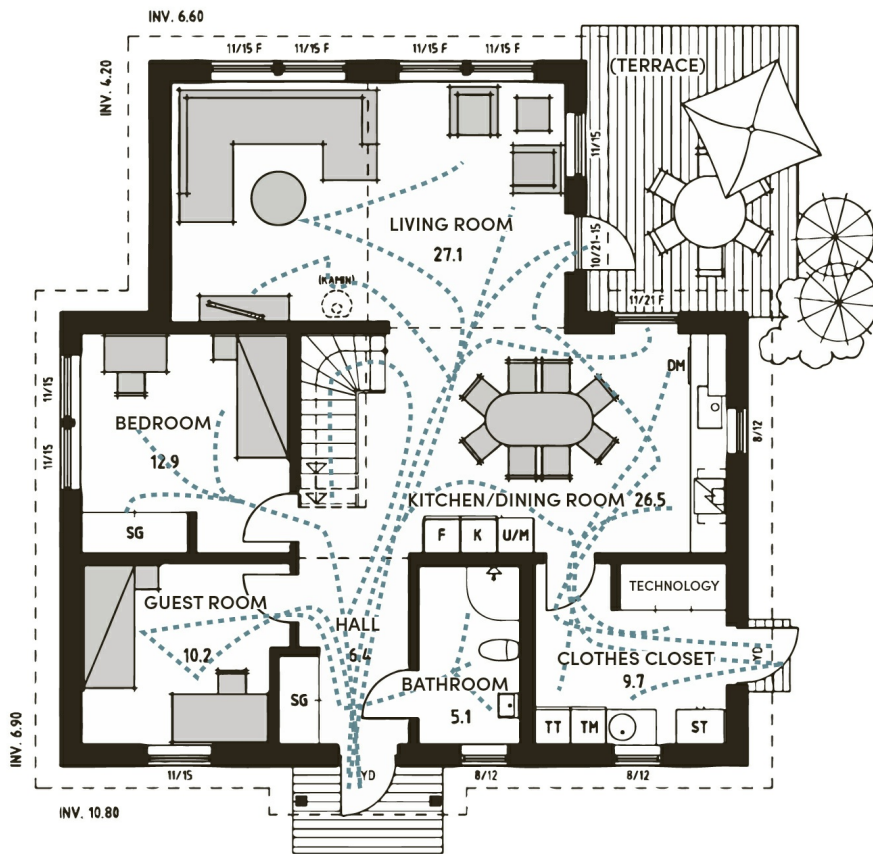
Practical Examples

- Hanging a single picture on its own with lots of space around it will boost the impact of what is otherwise a small and modest painting.
- In order to show a sculptural form to best advantage, place it against an empty background of a single color rather than against patterned wallpaper or a wall with pictures.
- Negative space can be used to reinforce the effect of natural light in a room. Minimalists often strive to create and take advantage of beautiful shadows and the way the light falls on empty surfaces.
- Leave empty space and create visual effects with the objects you place around it.

Flow Plan of Movement Around the House

When planning interiors, it's worth seriously thinking about the most common patterns of movement around the home. Where are the locations that experience the most traffic? Where are people located most of the time? Where are the most-constricted passages? Where do you have to ensure there is room for a number of people?

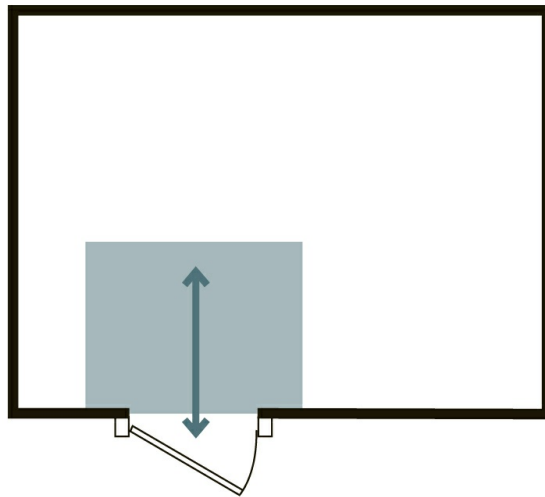
A simple way of doing this is to draw on the floor plan the movements you and the rest of the family make over the course of a day. This will help identify which rooms and locations have inherent problems because of the structure of the building, which parts will make particular demands on the choice of furniture and design accessories, and which areas leave you with a greater freedom of choice. From the floor plan, you will then be able to see the best positions for the furniture to allow optimal flow around the house and where to avoid causing a blockage.



If you draw the patterns of movement during a normal day on a copy of the floor plan, you will quickly see which parts of the house have the heaviest traffic.

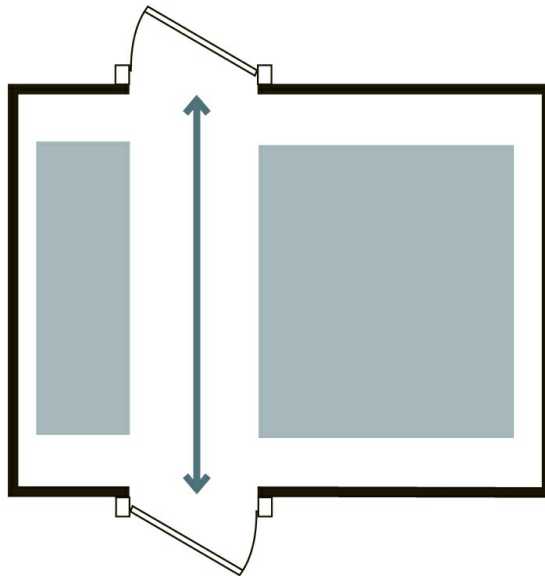
Doorways tend to divide rooms into invisible zones, and it is useful to be aware of them when furnishing the room. Depending on the location of the zones and where the doors lead, the density of traffic will vary, but you certainly won't want to position a sofa in the middle of a route or where it would disrupt the natural flow through the room. Mark the doorways and draw a line showing how you usually move between them—this will quickly show which zones to pay attention to.

In retail design, the space immediately inside the doorway of a shop is called the transition zone; it is the area in which customers halt briefly in order to get their bearings.



Transition zone

The space immediately inside the doorway is where you stop to take in the room.



Passages

If there are several doorways, the room will be divided into different furnishing zones.

You can use the same approach at home. You can either leave a small amount of extra space after a door or passage as a kind of transition zone between the rooms and the focal point, which is a little farther into the room, or you can prompt people to hesitate as they enter the room by having something that immediately catches their attention.



Different Kinds of Flow

Designers not only consider how people move around a house but they also take into account why they are moving from one place to another and what they do when they are in particular locations. This makes it easier to identify potential problem and constricted areas. You may find this helpful, too.

Service-related flow: How do you move into and out of or around the house in order to perform tasks such as unpacking the shopping or dealing with the trash? Can you remedy any blockages by furnishing in a different way?

Work-related flow: How do you move between different workstations in a room, between the sink and the dishwasher in the kitchen, or between the stove and the refrigerator, for instance? Is the design as well planned as it could be?

Family flow: How does the family move between different rooms in the course of a day? Where do they spend most of their time? Which passageways are likely to have more than one person moving at a time?

Guest flow: How do invited guests move from the entrance hall to social areas such as the kitchen, dining room, living room, and powder room? Does this flow clash with the more private parts of the home, and, if so, how can that be avoided?

Isovist

In architecture the term *isovist* is used to describe sight lines and visibility from a given point in a room. How much or how little can you see from a particular point?

From the perspective of survival, the ability to read and process information about our environment has always been important. That is probably why we seem to have an ability to identify the parts of a room that have the best isovist and thus provide optimal sight lines and visibility, and equally those places that have the least isovist and thus less visibility—and more protection, that is, hiding places.

In their book *Neurodesign*, neuroscientist Katarina Gospic and neurodesigner Isabelle Sjövall describe the biological background to this and why we need to design a room so that it offers both good visibility and the availability of more sheltered corners with less visibility. I think this might also explain why interior designers say that furniture should never be positioned so that anyone has to sit with their back to the door or that the head of the bed should never be at the door end of the bedroom.

“**Generally speaking, we can say that we like environments that challenge our brains just the right amount.**”

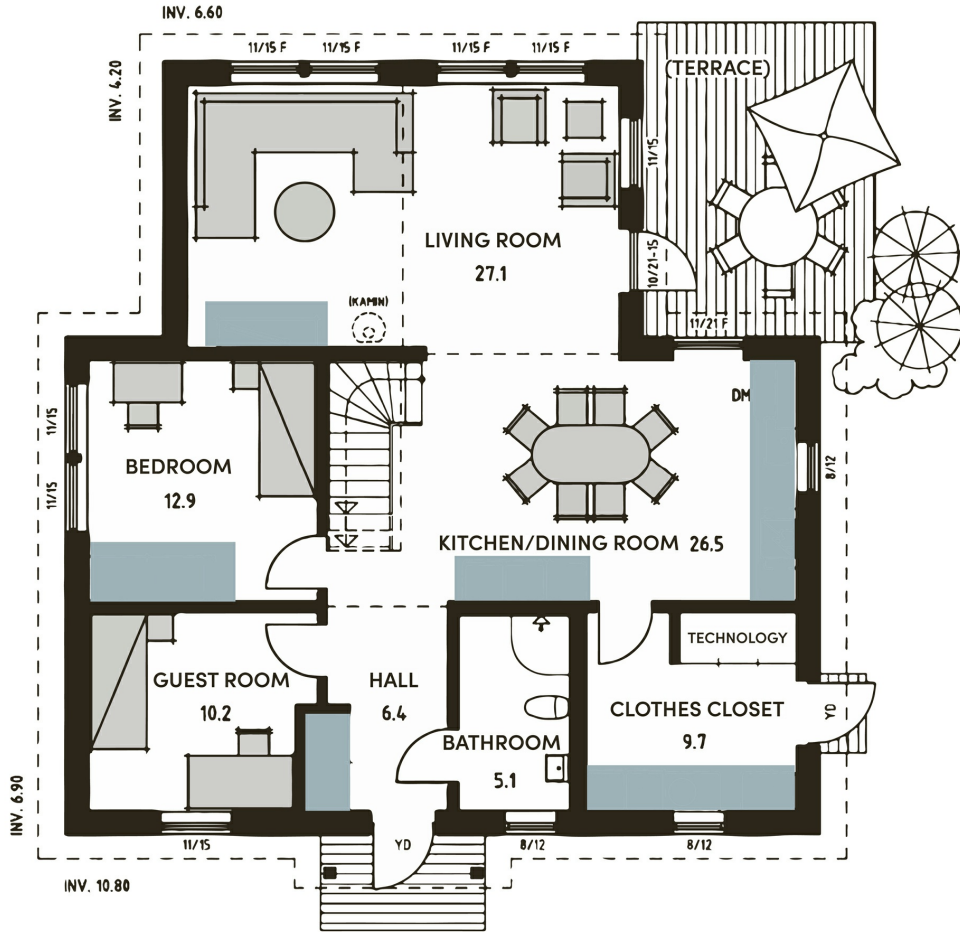
—Katarina Gospic

Given the open-plan layouts of today, it can be difficult to follow this approach when placing furniture, but you can try to ensure that the majority of seats in an arrangement of sofa and chairs, or the chairs at a dining table, do not face away from a doorway or passage. It is often possible to angle furniture in different ways. When following the isovist theory in an open-plan layout, the need for private areas is greater; the solution is to construct nooks with the help of low bookcases, houseplants, and the like.

The 2:8 Storage Principle

Everyone is always looking for advice about storage. A tip I have found very useful is what the storage expert Lu Wei calls the “2:8 principle,” the idea being that the “visual noise” of a home can be minimized by allowing only 20 percent of your things to be visible and putting away 80 percent. That may be taking things too far, but the basic idea is that the solution lies in having good and accessible everyday storage. Storage places should be strategically located in the house, preferably close to the traffic flow. To get a clear picture of the situation, it’s worth marking the possible storage locations in each room on the floor plan. Where are they? Are they open or closed? It is best to avoid having open storage places anywhere in a sight line since they can disturb the feel of several rooms simultaneously.

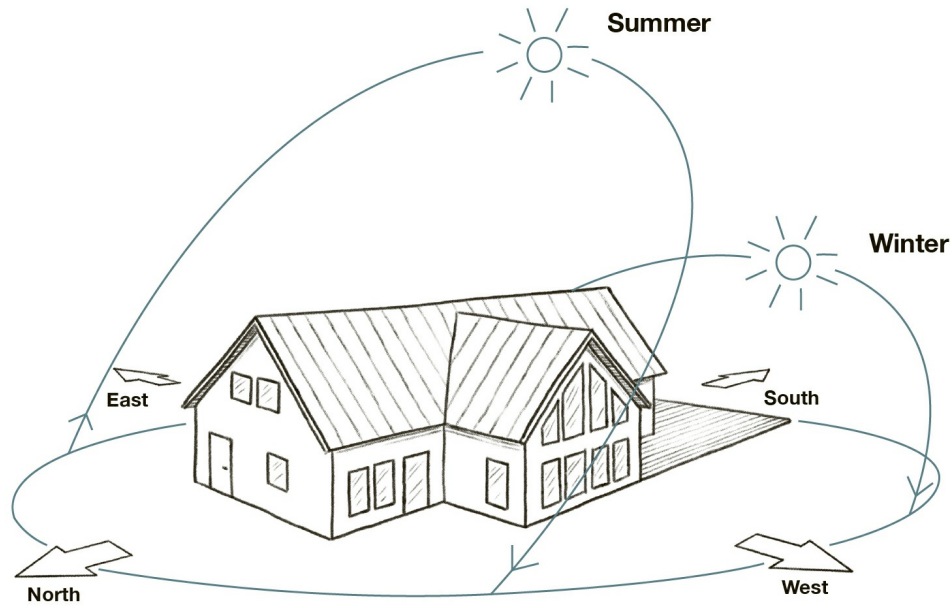
This exercise will reveal whether the storage is equally distributed around the house or there is a lack of balance. When you mark the plan, use different-color pens, one for open storage and one for closed. This will make it easier for you to see whether you lack space itself or a balance between closed and open storage.



Compass Directions

When working on the interior of your home, it is really useful to know the compass orientation of the rooms. When designing a house and planning the layout of buildings on a site, architects usually consider how the light falls at different times of the day. There are times, of course, when planning regulations, neighboring buildings, or changes in ground level make this impossible. Nevertheless, rooms that face north, south, east, or west have distinct advantages and disadvantages, which means that not all rooms are equally suitable for all activities. When you move into a house or apartment where the ground plan does not make that clear, you will find it useful to know how compass direction can affect the rooms—it will help you use and enjoy your home in the best possible way. (The following examples assume that you live in the Northern Hemisphere—in the Southern Hemisphere, the situations will, of course, be reversed.)

If, for instance, you like to sleep in a cool room, it would be silly to have a bedroom facing west, since the afternoon sun will warm it up. If you are one of those people who feel tired in the morning, it is a good idea to have an east-facing bedroom so that the morning light can wake you when the sun rises. How much sunlight reaches your home during the day will depend on the surroundings and on neighboring buildings. If you are among high-rise buildings or live close to shady woodlands, the effects may not be the same, but it is still good to know what influence the different compass directions may have.



North

The darkest and coolest rooms in the house will usually lie on this side. Since they receive sun only very early in the morning and for a short period in the evening, the big challenge is to get enough daylight, so good lighting is particularly important. And the daylight in north-facing rooms is colder, which means that cool colors become more marked and white walls take on a tinge of blue or pink.

East

The sun rises in the east, so there is natural sunlight here throughout the whole morning. Consequently, rooms heat up nicely during the summer but cool down quickly during the winter.

South

This is the direction that receives the most hours of sun—sometimes very strong sun—throughout the day. Some protection from the sun—pleated curtains, venetian blinds, or roller blinds, for instance—is important here to provide shade, cool the room, and prevent furniture and floors from fading in the sunlight. In south-facing rooms, the colors on the walls often seem lighter than in north-facing rooms.

West

The west side of the house is the one that is most affected by the climate, weathering, and general wear and tear. The west is where the afternoon and evening sun is at its most intense, drying out materials and shortening the durability of color on furniture and floors. If you live in a house where it is possible to plant trees and bushes to provide shade on this side, you should do so. And if there are bedrooms here, it's a good idea to have blackout curtains.

3

Tools to Help You Bring It All Together

For me, unity in interior design is when all the elements come together to create a beautiful sense of connectedness. That doesn't mean that every single item has to be perfectly matched, but the homes in which we most often sense this connectedness are those where thought has been given to things both large and small. Some people seem able to achieve it naturally; others need a little help along the way. In this chapter, I have gathered together a few mental tools and tips for those who find the creation of unity and connectedness in the home something of a challenge.



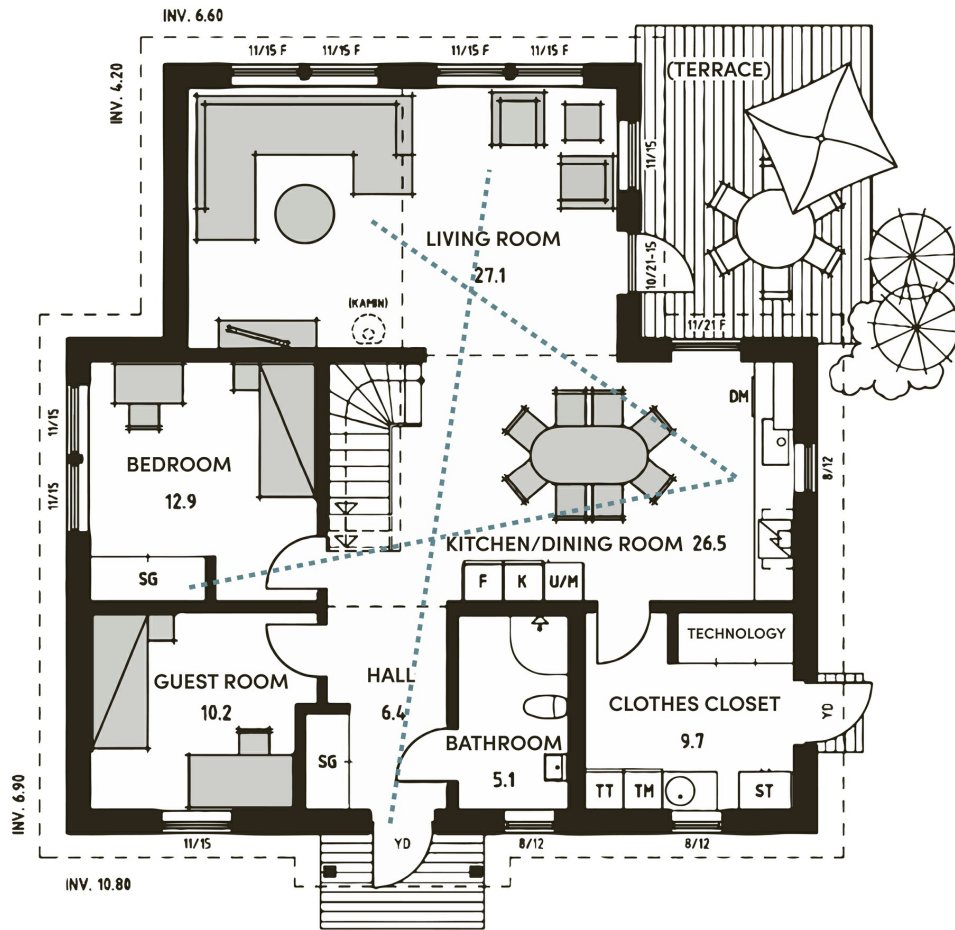
Sight Lines and Axiality

Architects planning houses and interiors often have the concept of enfilade (a group of rooms formally aligned with one another) or sight lines at the back of their minds, because there's a sense of spaciousness in buildings where it's possible to see through several rooms at the same time. And then there is axiality (the idea that says the longer the sight line alignment, the better the design). Researchers have written on the significance of this for the success and practicality of a home—to make it comfortable and pleasant and promote well-being. An axis is an imaginary line drawn between two points, running through two or more rooms and giving the observer the sense of a greater context. If the interior design of adjoining rooms is linked harmoniously, the observer's experience of the whole will be more pleasing. This is why it is important to be able to zoom out and see a design in its entirety rather than becoming so nearsighted that you see no more than one room at a time.

It's worth familiarizing yourself with this principle even if you don't live in a house with clear sight lines or if the problematic area does not have an open link with another room. Whatever sort of house or apartment you live in, you will still have to move past or through one room to reach the next, and consequently you will inevitably carry an impression of the first room with you when you go through to the next one.

Things to Think About

- Apart from the hall, which rooms can you see when you enter your home?
- What obvious sight lines do you need to take account of in your planning?
- Are there any adjoining rooms with doors that are usually left open?
- Which rooms do you have to pass by or pass through before reaching the room you are currently designing?
- What external objects are in your lines of sight, and how can they help you choose your colors or make design decisions? Is wood or the color of terra-cotta tiles or a copper roof visible through the window? Are there other elements in the distance or at the end of a sight line through your home?



Which rooms in your home are visible at the same time? Draw the sight lines on a copy of the floor plan so that you can clearly see which rooms belong together in design terms in order to achieve a harmonious whole.

The Red Thread

In Greek mythology, Theseus found his way out of the Minotaur's labyrinth by following the red thread he was given by Ariadne. When someone is giving a speech or a lecture and becomes muddled, we often say they have "lost the thread." Conversely, interior designers and stylists often navigate their way through a home with the help of a theme that connects the different rooms and parts of the house.

As the name suggests, the red thread may actually be a color. (It can, of course, be blue, green, or any other color you care to name.) Or the thread can be metaphorical and composed of more subtle elements, such as a recurring type of wood, a shape, or anything else that prompts recognition from one room to another and ties them together.

Repetition

Repetition is often used as a means of creating structure. If similar elements are repeated in a number of places, the interior design feels more considered and cohesive. Once again, it is simply a case of creating recognition by consciously having a specific color, shape, texture, line, or detail recur in different places. This is especially suitable for people who like maximalism, because repetition creates a sense of well-ordered organization.

Gradual Increase

The songwriters at a popular Swedish music competition make frequent use of key changes when composing their hits—in simple terms, that just means the melody is repeated at a different frequency. Progression can be used in a similar way in interior design: an element is gradually changed in size or in strength. So, for example, you can work with different heights, or you can gradually increase the size of similar candlesticks on a table, or you can gradually change the color.

Wow, Aha, Bridge

If you want your favorite color or your intended theme to stand out clearly, it is rarely enough to have only one example of it per room or line of sight. One good ploy I've learned to ensure that a new piece of information or experience makes an impression is to create *wow* feelings and *aha* experiences. But how to translate that into interior design? Start by identifying some of the transition zones where you and your guests pause as you enter (the entrance, the doorway to the living room, the passageway in a hall). Then apply three-point thinking (see [this page](#)) and make the "red thread" recur in at least three places along the sight line. If you are working along the line between two end points, the first place at which the red thread will be seen is where it lies closest to the observer: make that point create a *wow* feeling. Where a glimpse of it sparks recognition at the far end of the line of sight is the place to create an *aha* feeling. Between those two points you will place a subtle thematic bridge, and you now have *wow, aha, bridge*.

Here's a concrete example. The first thing that strikes you about a room is the beautiful, muted green color on the walls and ceiling. Your spontaneous impression on seeing this will perhaps be "Wow, what a fantastic color!" When your gaze then moves on through a doorway, your eye catches a painting in a beautiful shade of green hanging in your sight line: that's the "aha." Looking at the painting, you recognize where the owners found their unique color palette. But it does not only recur on the walls and ceiling, it is also picked up by "bridges"—the lights with green shades, the fabrics and pillows, the seat cushions, and the pattern on the sofa. Everything in this room plays on both *wow* and *aha*. Do you see the "green thread"?

Examples of Things That Can Tie an Interior Design Together

- A common color or connected color palette
- A recurring choice of materials
- Using the same variety of wood
- Drawing on details or themes in a work of art, a hobby, an interest, or a sport you participate in
- Focusing on the style of a particular period or the year the house was built
- Thinking of a particular designer or design language

Don't Ignore the History of the House

When selecting materials or furniture to carry out a renovation, designers often talk enthusiastically of the importance of taking the age and period of the house into consideration. This is not something to be followed slavishly, but they do have a point: sticking to the basic concepts and character of the place often leads to a more harmonious result, particularly if you are making permanent changes to the bathroom or kitchen, for instance.

My feeling is that this is not unlike the business of choosing clothes. The simplest way to find what suits you is to stop worrying about smart appearances in general and concentrate instead on what works for your particular body type.

For me, the unity of a house is better seen if its interior and exterior are not thought of as separate, and if the interior design is allowed—in a few well-chosen places—to flirt with the architectural style of the house. If we consider the history of the building, we will find a red thread that can lead us to a treasure trove of ideas about suitable furniture, materials, and accessories. It can inspire us in all sorts of ways, in everything from the choice of colors and wallpaper, the style and design of the period the house was built, and the work typical of designers of that period. Learning about the decade in which the house or apartment was built can be a rewarding way of discovering ideas that may lead you to the particular red thread for your home.

If you want the interior design to reflect the period of the house without turning your home into a time capsule and becoming involved in full-scale building preservation, it will probably be sufficient to focus on specific details that capture the essence of the original period. Give some thought to the ideas prompted by these details and consider how modern solutions can perhaps be clothed in more period-appropriate dress. Which particular elements, materials, or shapes do you find attractive and want to use? What, given the way we live today, can be simply ignored? What do you have to do to integrate the best of the past with the present in your home?

Think Like an Architect

When we moved into our town house, I didn't give much thought to its architecture and history. I was far too busy problem-solving, such as struggling with poor acoustics and badly designed windows, to think about the architecture—until one day I came across the previous owners' housing brochure and found the planning project for the whole development. It was a revelation! On page after page, the developers and architects explained their thinking, the sources of their inspiration, and why certain elements in the construction of the buildings recurred.

Having read the brochure, I recognized that 1930s functionalism had been the model for the whole estate—which, tongue in cheek, was often referred to as "those white birdhouses." I had heard of functionalism but never been sufficiently interested in the history of architecture to look into the ideas that lay behind it. But my curiosity was aroused and I started reading more about the period, borrowing books from the library and searching for information online. Suddenly I understood, and things I had noticed but not appreciated took on a new significance. The rounded window, the pitched roof, the large areas of glass, and the limestone windowsills—even the door handles—all acquired a deeper meaning once I understood how the architect's mind had been working and the ideas that underpinned this modern interpretation of the ideals of functionalism. Closeness to nature, the importance of daylight, practical solutions, and quality of life achieved by simplicity—these were values that tied in with my own. All of a sudden, it became easier to see the house in its context and to understand what I personally had to add to fill in the last pieces of the puzzle. Even though our house was actually built in 2006/2007, I chose to use interiors from the 1930s as my model when we renovated our kitchen. In other words, we flirted with the architect's ideas. For the same reason, I chose a white kitchen with flush doors, even though the current ideal in magazines and online was a rustic-feeling gray kitchen with paneled doors with rail frames.

You may have the same kind of discovery in front of you! If you learn a bit more about your house and the period the architect drew inspiration from, you may find it gives you access to a visual treasure chest of ideas.

Take Inspiration from History

Drawing inspiration from the building and borrowing the architect's lens when you set about designing your room or home can be fun and make the task easier, but if you aren't familiar with architectural history and the different periods of design, it is not easy to know where and how to find pointers.

There are many good books available to anyone interested in learning more about house types and their unique characteristics. On the following pages, I'll give you a short synopsis of some of the most important interior and exterior features of Swedish houses.

The time-line survey of homes is by no means a complete description, but it does provide some examples of the most common characteristics from the various decades. There are, of course, many variations, and it is difficult to lay down exact time lines. Some of the descriptions relate more to apartment blocks than to individual houses, but they have been included anyway since they tell us something about their period. What I want to do is to give you a taste of the characteristic elements in the hope that this elementary overview will encourage you to read further and discover more about the decades that interest you.

“Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space.”

–Ludwig Mies van der Rohe



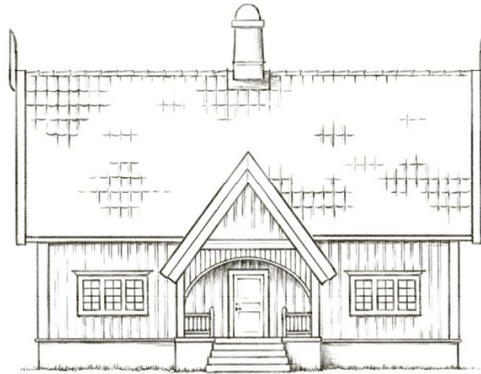
1900s
Art Nouveau

Exterior

- **Facade:** Smooth or rough plastered facades in light yellow or beige colors.
- **Roof:** Mansard roof, red pantiles.
- **Windows:** Single-paned lower sections and upper sections divided into small square panes. Oval windows, so-called ox-eye windows, also occur. Leaded glass.
- **Outside door:** Glazed with small panes.
- **Typical period details:** Balconies and bay windows. Rounded window shapes, gable windows, domes, frontispieces.

Interior

- **Floors:** Oak parquet, though linoleum (cork) caught on as an imitation. Floors (even pine floorboards) commonly varnished.
- **Interior doors:** Paneled door with mirrors. Double doors.
- **Door handles:** Soft curves with a rosette and keyhole plate or solid brass backplate.
- **Fireplaces:** Smooth, light-color tile stoves, sometimes with simple decoration. Leaf and flower ornamentation.
- **Wallpaper:** Narrow, wavy lines and plant motifs taken from Swedish flora. Usually wide wallpaper borders below the ceiling. Rather restrained but not muted colors.
- **Furniture:** Often oak, with carved motifs, frequently of fruit. High-backed seating. Onion-shaped swellings on chair and table legs.
- **Lighting:** Oil lamps common prior to electricity. Electric lighting probably depended on wealth and social status.
- **Bathroom:** Earth closet. Freestanding, cast-iron bathtub with lion or claw feet. Usually marble or limestone (clinker cement) floors. Lower part of walls tiled, upper part covered with grooved paneling treated with linseed oil.
- **Kitchen:** Kitchen equipment gray or beige in color; so-called birch-grain coloring also popular. Work surfaces topped with marble or zinc; untreated or oiled wooden boards also appeared. Kitchen walls normally smooth plastered, sometimes covered with grooved paneling. Open shelves mounted on brackets.



1910s

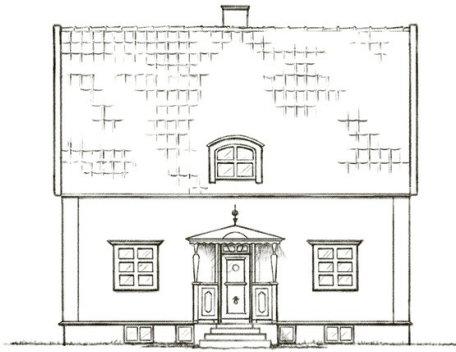
National Romantic

Exterior

- **Facade:** Wooden boards, horizontal or vertical, often with knots. Dark facades, tarred or painted with rye-flour paint—often “falu red.” Corners and trim painted white.
- **Roof:** Steep, sometimes mansard, with pantiles. Dormer windows.
- **Windows:** Small with small panes. Surrounds and weatherboarding pronounced, often painted white, brown, or green.
- **Outside door:** Wooden, painted with linseed oil. Small panes.
- **Typical period details:** Inspiration drawn from old Scandinavian mythology and the Viking age. Marked influence of red rural cottages. Exuberant joinery work: shutters, porches, verandas, heart and sun cutouts in the gables. The rural ideal of the good home.

Interior

- **Floors:** Tongue-and-groove floorboards, varnished or covered with linoleum.
- **Interior doors:** Paneled doors with rail frames.
- **Door handles:** Solid brass or chromed steel.
- **Fireplaces:** Rounded and flat tiled stoves with flower decorations or ancient Scandinavian patterns. Single-color, pale green or blue tiles with patterns in relief. Box-shaped tiled stoves with an upper section narrower than the lower were a novelty. Large stonework open fireplaces were popular—reminiscent of the community gathering around the fire in ancient times.
- **Wallpaper:** Gobelin wallpapers and walls with painted panels. Wallpaper designs similar to the previous decade but clearer and more simplified.
- **Furniture:** Built-in furniture and seating was common. Traditional rustic, saturated colors; design inspired by folklore.
- **Lighting:** Clear glass and frosted glass shades. Pendant lamps.
- **Bathroom:** New homes were fitted with a washroom with a washbasin, dressing table, toilet, and bath. Walls were lime-plastered and given several coats of linseed-oil paint. Tiled up to about 5 feet (152 cm). In more basic homes, this consisted of a wash bowl, wash jug, and bathtub.
- **Kitchen:** Kitchen cupboards often painted zinc green or traditional rustic, saturated colors. The cupboards had simple external latches. Tiles with beveled edges, the joints filled with chalk, pigment, and water (and later with tile grouting). Edgings and pilasters found in wealthier homes. More basic homes had a woodstove used for both heating and cooking; open shelves and hooks held tools and utensils.



1920s

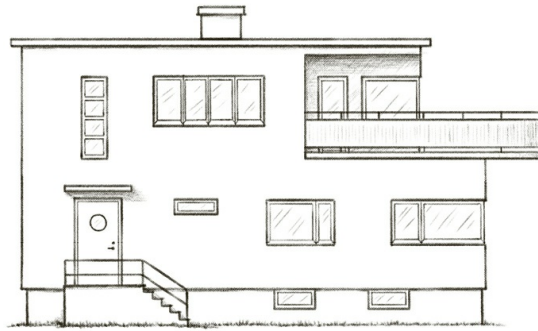
1920s Classicism

Exterior

- **Facade:** Symmetrical wood or plaster facades, often with columns and pilasters with capitals; decorated with medallions, festoons, and dentils.
- **Roof:** Ridge roof with 45-degree pitch and pantiles; small dormer windows on the long side. Pronounced eaves.
- **Windows:** Tall windows (three panes in height) on the ground floor; lower windows (two panes in height) on upper floor. Lunette windows.
- **Outside door:** Roof supported on brackets. Overhead light. Open porch with cement base.
- **Typical period details:** Balconies with wooden pillars; wooden fences with balusters and profiled uprights. Copper dentil frieze. More expensive homes often had interior coffered ceilings. Garages became more common in the 1920s.

Interior

- **Floor:** Narrow spruce or pine floorboards, varnished or soap-scrubbed; visible or covered with linoleum. Oak parquet, fishbone pattern with edging.
- **Interior doors:** Wooden doors, glazed, or with three equal-size wooden panels. Single doors.
- **Door handles:** Wooden grip, stained black, and keyhole plate of chromed steel.
- **Fireplaces:** Central heating, so houses no longer dependent on tiled stoves. Open fireplaces with straight lines and marble mantelpiece.
- **Wallpaper:** Geometrical lines, circles, stepped shapes, or ornamentation and flowers inspired by Asia. Wallpapers and fabrics in calm, muted colors.
- **Furniture:** Swedish Grace (a pastiche of Nordic folk designs from the Art Deco period). Clean, simple lines in elm and birch woods.
- **Lighting:** In 1922, 80 percent of Stockholmers had electric lighting at home; in addition to ceiling lights, table lamps and standard lamps became more common.
- **Bathroom:** In the 1920s, homes acquired lavatories (with toilet) and bathrooms, often separate. The freestanding bath became simpler and less ornamented. Walls and floor were tiled to protect against water. White tiles were popular, but colored tiles (dark red, dark blue, green) also appeared. Pipework was external, and lavatory cisterns were a higher level.
- **Kitchen:** Light colors (beige and pale yellow) and glossy linoleum became popular. Upper-wall cupboards were introduced as a fixed part of the design. Tiles on the walls were often placed edge to edge without grouting.



1930s

Functionalism/Modernism

Exterior

- **Facade:** Cube shapes and light-color plaster facades, or thin, standing wood panels.
- **Roof:** Flat roof, sometimes clad in copper or sheet metal.
- **Windows:** Long horizontal window bands often with narrow—or no—architraves; large panes of glass without mullions or transoms. Emphasis on the horizontal rather than on the vertical. Windows run around corners to allow more light and to demonstrate the new possibilities of construction and materials.
- **Outside door:** Wooden door with circular glass window.
- **Typical period details:** Houses positioned on plots to allow maximum access to daylight. Curving balconies, often running around the corner; corrugated-iron balcony frontage. Balcony flooring and fixings left visible. The lines of the building are emphasized.

Interior

- **Floors:** Parquet flooring in various patterns, tongue-and-groove floorboards, or linoleum.
- **Interior doors:** Sliding doors and flush doors of lamella construction (vaulted, with a crisscross pattern). Masonite had a breakthrough.
- **Door handles:** Black Bakelite, wood, or chrome.
- **Fireplaces:** Slightly curved, brick/stone built. Light-color cement.
- **Wallpaper/walls:** Smooth internal walls and light wallpapers, or mural wallpaper that from a distance resembled a rough, plastered wall. Internal wall and woodwork were light in color but rarely completely white—often muted pastel shades.
- **Furniture:** Functionalism, Bauhaus, and International style influences. Tubular metal furniture, linear forms. Bakelite, chrome, stainless steel, colored glass.
- **Bathroom:** Bathrooms were simple and had most of today's features. External pipework. Usually smooth white tiles on the walls or painted plywood. Black-and-white chessboard floor. Lavatories with low cisterns were introduced.
- **Kitchen:** Flush cupboard doors with a slightly rounded profile. The doors were partial insets so that only about a third of the thickness was visible on the outside—this gave them a light look and feel. Metal-sprung door latches, simple knobs, metal cup handles on drawers. Wall cabinets went to ceiling height but had a bottom section with smaller or sliding doors. Storage racks with glass containers for dry goods such as salt and flour became popular. Air vents were provided to deal with cooking smells.



1940s

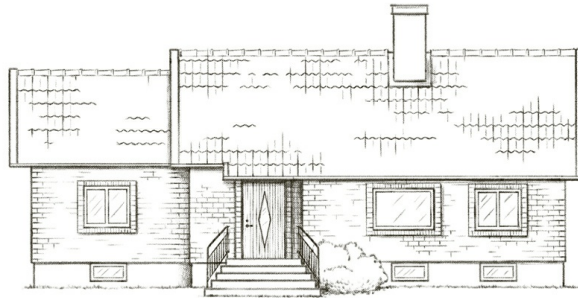
Welfare State Functionalism

Exterior

- **Facade:** Vertical wooden board and batten siding, often painted yellow, pale gray, or green. Plaster.
- **Roof:** Gable roof with 20-degree pitch.
- **Windows:** Double casement windows with wooden frames.
- **Outside door:** Paneled, single pane of glass.
- **Typical period details:** Balconies with visible floor panels and wooden frontages.

Interior

- **Floors:** Spruce, oak, or beech parquet. Linoleum, all one color, or chessboard vinyl tiles.
- **Interior doors:** Flush doors.
- **Door handles:** Steel with white plastic or hardwood handles. Chrome backplate with keyhole.
- **Wallpaper:** Muted nature motifs in pale pastel colors.
- **Furniture:** Swedish Modern. Pale-colored bentwood furniture. Webbing seats. Molded plywood, fiberglass, elm, and birch. Muted colors.
- **Bathroom:** White porcelain. Bath usually freestanding but beginning to be built in. Glazed tiles on the wall. Gustavsberg mixer tap instead of separate hot and cold.
- **Kitchen:** Freestanding kitchen furniture loses out to more economical standardized units. Angled or straight cupboards with Masonite sliding doors were introduced; otherwise doors hung on barrel hinges. The great standardization of kitchen dimensions and equipment in Swedish homes took place: more ergonomically designed in terms of the height of work surfaces and seating.



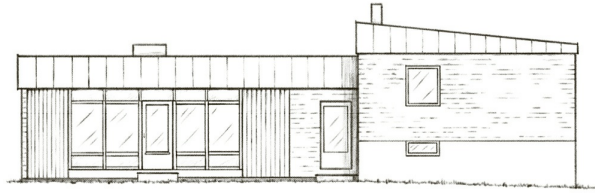
1950s
Postwar Period

Exterior

- **Facade:** Single-story brick house.
- **Roof:** Straightforward gable roof of double pantiles.
- **Windows:** Rectangular pivot windows. Different-size windows in different rooms, often larger in the living room.
- **Outside door:** Teak door with groove design.
- **Typical period details:** Side extensions with different roof heights. Windows and outside doors framed in brickwork. Decorative wrought-iron railings.

Interior

- **Floors:** In social and living areas, oak, fishbone, or cork parquet, and cork linoleum. Natural stone in the lavatory and entrance hall.
- **Interior doors:** Exotic varieties of wood, such as teak or gaboan.
- **Door handles:** Stainless steel with mahogany or ribbed bone-white plastic handles. Stainless-steel backplates.
- **Fireplaces:** Stonework with curved hoods.
- **Wallpaper:** Geometrical patterns and strong contrasts.
- **Furniture:** Scandinavian design. Typical furniture included Stringhylla ("String shelf") bookcases, the butterfly chair, sideboards, writing tables, dressing tables, bedside tables, and chests of drawers. Teak was big, as was IKEA. Vinyl, chrome details, stainless steel. Decorated porcelain. Curtains with valances.
- **Lighting:** Standard and table lamps of brass and teak; lampshades of fabric, plastic, or varnished metal. Bright colors and strong pastel shades.
- **Bathroom:** Checkered floor. Colored bathroom details (green, turquoise). Cabinet with a rotating mirror door. Mosaics of every sort—on the walls, on the floor, on the bath surrounds! Sintered porcelain slabs on the floor. Pedestals under sinks to conceal the pipes became more common.
- **Kitchen:** Kitchens became more angular and formal, with framework and doors made of new lighter materials. Wall units had sloping fronts, lower work surfaces than those of today. Handles were teak. Bright pastel colors or whole designs in teak veneer. The classic laminate countertop pattern Virrvarr began production in 1958.



1960s

The Record Years, Postwar Period

Exterior

- **Facade:** Brick, cement, reconstituted stone with gray grouting. Facades often had built-in glass blocks to allow light in.
- **Roof:** Gable roofs with 25-degree slope; black, concrete double pantiles. Pent roofs with metal detailing.
- **Windows:** Long windows with low ledges. Windows with two panes, painted wooden frames.
- **Outside door:** Teak door with groove design. Glass panes at the side of the door rather than in the door itself.
- **Typical period details:** One-story detached houses still common, but split-level houses also occur.

Interior

- **Floors:** Wall-to-wall carpets and vinyl. Tiles and natural stone in the hall.
- **Interior doors:** Glass; living room doors with patterned or etched glass.
- **Door handles:** Stainless steel with bone-white, black, or gray plastic handles. Separate key plates.
- **Fireplaces:** Brick fireplaces.
- **Wallpaper:** Seagrass and woven patterns.
- **Lighting:** Plastic and fabric shades.
- **Furniture:** Teak and mahogany. Slim, neat legs on sofas and upholstered chairs. Futuristic shapes, such as the Jetson armchair. Muted shades of blue and gray.
- **Bathroom:** Half-tiled walls. Herringbone tiling. Bath tiled in. Colors! Bidet is common again. Perstorp launched their plastic flooring—more expensive than tiles but easier to clean; also used as a wall covering. Ceramic floor tiles measured 4 by 4 inches (10 by 10 cm).
- **Kitchen:** Ceilings and woodwork usually painted white; cupboard doors often a darker color—gray, blue, or green. Wooden handles on doors and drawers, glass or metal knobs on cupboards. Gaboon veneer often used on doors and cupboard doors as a cheaper and more available alternative to mahogany. The 1960s saw the end of pantries built against outside walls: fridges and cool cupboards replaced them.



1970s

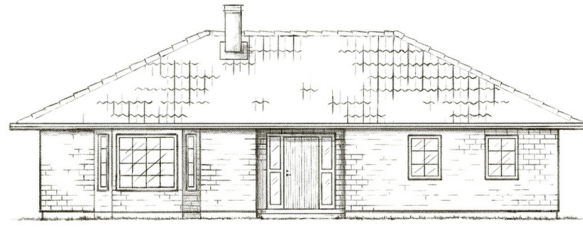
The Swedish Social Democratic Party's Public Housing Million Program

Exterior

- **Facade:** Vertical tongue-and-groove boards.
- **Roof:** Large, dominant roofs of black concrete pantiles.
- **Windows:** Side-hung, outward-opening windows without architraves. Decorative but nonfunctioning exterior shutters. Triple glazing became standard.
- **Outside door:** Patterned teak or rustic stained timber.
- **Typical period details:** No cellars. Brick gables, brick to lower edge of windows. Bavarian-style balcony covered by the roof with outdoor area beneath it. The Million Program is often thought of as a period of apartment blocks, but 335,000 small detached houses were also built.

Interior

- **Floors:** Wall-to-wall carpets, patterned vinyl, clear-varnished pine. Tile in bathroom showers and hallways.
- **Interior doors:** Doors, architraves, and handles all in plastic. Rural-style wooden interior doors.
- **Door handles:** Plastic handles of various colors. Brass handles. Simplified keys.
- **Fireplaces:** Fireplaces were less common as a combination of nuclear energy and the oil crisis meant most houses were heated by electricity.
- **Wallpaper:** Large patterns, woven and velour patterns.
- **Lighting:** Pine lamps. Velvet shades with fringes and tassels. Swedish lighting company Ateljé Lyktan launched their Bumling lamps.
- **Furniture:** Pine, stained or varnished (clear). Windsor chairs. Low, soft sofas with big back and side cushions. Upholstery in corduroy. Green, brown, and orange were popular colors.
- **Bathroom:** Wooden bathroom cupboards with vertical blinds. Cloth covers for the toilet seat and cover. Toilet mat. Toilet screened off from bath. Shower units launched as energy-saving units following the oil crisis. Bidets mounted on the wall or the floor. Brown and beige Höganäs tiles. The golden age of plastic—used for everything!
- **Kitchen:** Colored appliances, colored tiles, rustic cupboard doors. Handles were often wooden knobs or round and concave plastic knobs. Three rows of tiles became standard as the backsplash behind the sink (two rows had been standard earlier).



1980s

Postmodernism

Exterior

- **Facade:** Pastel-colored reconstituted stone, plaster, or wood.
- **Roof:** Hipped roofs with gray concrete pantiles.
- **Windows:** Two-light windows with false sash bars attached to the glass.
- **Outside door:** Painted wood.
- **Typical period details:** Inspired by American bungalows. Bay windows. Arched doorways and pillars indoors.

Interior

- **Floors:** Engineered parquet flooring, linoleum, tiles of imitation natural stone.
- **Interior doors:** White-painted paneled door or painted flush door.
- **Door handles:** Antique-style brass with separate key plates.
- **Fireplaces:** Freestanding, angular, metal stoves.
- **Wallpaper:** White walls or light wallpapers. Pastel colors.
- **Lighting:** Porcelain lamps. Rice lampshades. Large chrome standard lamps.
- **Furniture:** Freestanding and sculptural items. Exclusive details as markers of success. Mass-produced, chipboard furnishings popular. Sectional sofas and leather sofas. Glass tables. Accessories and fabrics in colors like mint green, apricot, turquoise, and brilliant neon. Mirror walls. Ceiling fans. China figurines. Basketwork chairs. Frilly curtains. Waterbeds.
- **Bathroom:** Marbled tiles and nonmatching tiles with painted motifs. Waterproofed floor and walls. Shower unit.
- **Kitchen:** White-and-gray kitchen with paneled cupboard doors. Laminate work surfaces with marble or terrazzo appearance. Ceramic stovetops and microwave ovens are introduced.



1990s

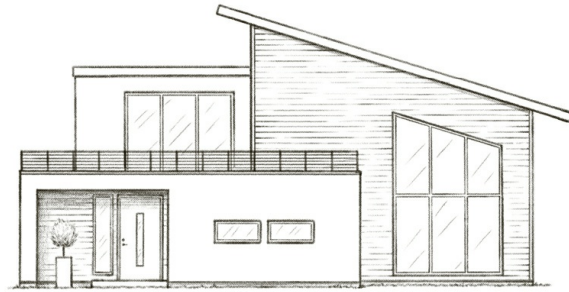
Neo-modernism or Mixed Style

Exterior

- **Facade:** Wooden panels inspired by the 1890s.
- **Roof:** Traditional pantiles or metal.
- **Windows:** Wooden windows with artificial sash bars on the glass. Ornate bargeboards.
- **Outside door:** Weatherproof uPVC doors.
- **Typical period details:** Prominent corner boards. Panel joints covered by moldings. Frontispieces. Gables with decorative woodwork.

Interior

- **Floors:** Engineered parquet flooring of pine, birch, or red woods such as cherry or stained oak.
- **Interior doors:** Form-pressed doors with rail frames. Flush doors with rounded window.
- **Door handles:** Antique-style brass with porcelain handles.
- **Fireplaces:** Glass-fronted stoves on glass floorplates.
- **Wallpaper:** Mushroom-colored walls. Wallpapers with brushstroke patterns. Wallpaper edging with fruit motifs. Popular colors are ultramarine, English red, yellow ocher, terracotta. Tricia Guild designs.
- **Furniture:** Tubular steel with stretched leather seats. Glass display cases and cabinets with small drawers. Units for stereo and home electronics such as VHS and CD players. Beanbags. Table lamps with patterned or pleated fabric shades. Accessories such as gilded sun mirrors and wrought-iron candlesticks. Dried and everlasting flowers.
- **Bathroom:** Decorative tiles and colored waterproof linings. Toward the end of the decade, tiled feature walls in nonmatching colors.
- **Kitchen:** Oak cupboard doors. Colored tiles, tiled mosaic, or an edging of colored tiles. Stainless-steel appliances gain ground. Built-in ovens become popular; induction stovetops are introduced.



2000s

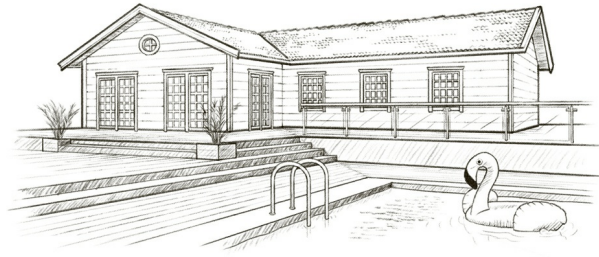
Neo-modernism, the Millennium

Exterior

- **Facade:** Flat, thin plaster painted in silicone masonry paint. Horizontal tongue-and-groove and oiled hardwood.
- **Roof:** Roof does not overhang facade; pent roof slopes away from the entrance side of the house. Untreated zinc sheets.
- **Windows:** Factory-coated aluminum frames. Windows in the same plane as the facade, with no surrounds.
- **Outside door:** Grooved hardwood with round or oblong window.
- **Typical period details:** Large wooden deck. Open floor plan. Simple lines, large panorama windows, and roof with a shallow slope.

Interior

- **Floors:** Wooden and parquet floors.
- **Interior doors:** Glazed doors. Birch or varnished.
- **Door handles:** Brushed steel with separate key plates.
- **Fireplaces:** Brick-built fireplaces and stove unit with single-pane glass front. Stove units suspended from the ceiling also appeared.
- **Wallpaper:** Painted walls and wallpapered feature walls. Popular colors were latte, beige, shades of light brown.
- **Lighting:** Spotlights inset in the ceiling.
- **Furniture:** Light and fresh style, or New Nordic. A new era for Danish design in the mid-price range with many new start-ups, such as &Tradition, Muuto, HAY, Normann Copenhagen, and Ferm Living. Light-color woods, furniture with powder-coated detail, matte surfaces, and furniture with hourglass shapes. Living room furniture and divan sofas with firm backs and plump arms. Playful shapes. Woven plastic mats (forerunners of Pappelina rugs). Flat-screen, wall-mounted televisions and ceiling projectors begin to compete with cathode-ray TVs as home cinema became a trend.
- **Bathroom:** Mosaic pillars in the shower. Wall-mounted toilets. Rainfall showerheads. Floor heating. Heated towel rails.
- **Kitchen:** High-gloss cupboard doors. Work surfaces in durable composites. Stainless-steel appliances. Glass and wallpaper behind glass backsplashes.



2010s

Individualism

Exterior

- **Facade:** Cube shapes. White, black, or gray. Large detached houses. Terraces and semidetached. New England inspiration. Teak wood panel or brushed concrete.
- **Roof:** Gable roof or open-beam ceiling. Metal roofing on verandas. Sometimes with dormer windows and cross gables.
- **Windows:** Retro muntins and window awnings. Asymmetrical positioning of windows.
- **Outside door:** Rustic style. Country house inspiration.
- **Typical period details:** L- or H-shaped houses. Gable-end entrance. American veranda. Conservatory or sunroom. Glass fencing around decking and verandas in the more modern style of house. Extended wooden decking with pools.

Interior

- **Floors:** Wooden, parquet, and concrete floors. Simpler ways of laying herringbone parquet were introduced. Moroccan and patterned floor tiles. Long wooden floorboards of Douglas fir were popular.
- **Interior doors:** Flush or Shaker-inspired doors with prominent frames.
- **Door handles:** Chrome or brushed chrome. Polished or brushed brass. A wide range of handles and fittings in various metals and leather.
- **Fireplaces:** Brick-built fireplaces and stove units with single-pane glass fronts. Steel stove units. Chimney-free, bioethanol stoves in traditional or futuristic forms.
- **Wallpaper:** Painted gray or beige or dark walls. Patterned wallpapers. Classic William Morris patterns became fashionable.
- **Lighting:** Incandescent lightbulbs banned.
- **Furniture:** Sofas with linen and velvet covers. Covered headboards. Marble, brass, copper. Wood and leather. Retro design and new interpretations of older models. Pedestals and sculptures. Pretty accessories with strong character.
- **Bathroom:** Drawer-shaped sinks, wall mounted or on slim, lacquered metal legs. Flush or patterned frontages of lacquered MDF. Porcelain sinks on shelves. Marble countertops. Slim wall mirrors with integrated LED lighting. Slim, bespoke floor drains.
- **Kitchen:** Gray kitchens. Absence of wall cupboards—sometimes open shelving. Wide variety of fittings. Brass taps and details. Shaker kitchens.

Mixing Styles

What should you do if you are attracted to several different styles of interior design at the same time? And what if you aren't keen on the character of the house you are living in? Or you happen to live with someone whose tastes are very different? In situations like this, is it possible to go ahead and mix different styles?

Yes! After all, you are the one making the decisions. The more styles you mix, the greater the challenge you will have when attempting to create unity. But faced with the fact that you have several different stylistic preferences, it's nice to know that there are a variety of techniques to help you deal with apparently impossible clashes.

Dominance and Spice

A straight mixture, half and half, rarely works. It's better to let one style dominate and another to spice it up a little—80/20 rather than 50/50 should be the goal. Try to stick to an agreed line on basic furniture (sofa, bookcases, bed, dining room table), as it is often expensive to buy and you won't change it, or ought not to, too many times during your life. The more daring aspects of your taste—the spice—should be expressed in the smaller details—in works of art or the lighting. You will inevitably have variations here and there, but I think this offers you the best chance of creating an overall impression of unity.

Style Triangles

If you prefer to work with three styles rather than the 80/20 idea, you could use what's known as a style triangle. In this case, two more or less closely related styles will act as the base, and a contrasting style will provide the spice—Scandinavian and Japanese minimalism, for instance, spiced with a rustic element. It is possible, of course, to mix many more styles, but once you start working with four or five, there is a great risk that the overall feeling will become very disjointed.

Color Harmony

A good tip when you are trying to bring a sense of unity to a variety of different styles is to use color harmony, which, by introducing a common theme, will help connect the disparate parts.

Avoid Clusters

If you gather all the “spicy” elements together in one place, the stylistic clash is likely to be violent. You’ll achieve a greater sense of unity if you spread the spice around the room.

The Same Mood Rather than the Same Style

Even though there is no need for the details of the design to match in terms of form and appearance, it is best if they bring a coherent mood to the home. So, for example, if the mood you wish to create is an easygoing, laid-back feeling, you should probably avoid upright, austere styles of furniture.

Visual Noise

Few people would deny that loud, disturbing, monotonous noises are painful to listen to. It doesn’t take much to be irritating, as anyone knows who has tried to sleep with a mosquito buzzing around the room. But fewer people recognize that the visual equivalent can be equally disturbing. Whether we prefer our surroundings to contain a multitude of items or only a few, there will always be something that triggers our irritation.

Look around the room you are in at the moment and be honest with yourself: is there nothing there you find annoying, even if it doesn’t usually occur to you? I’m not talking about untidiness or those piles of things waiting to be cleared away, but issues such as the position of a piece of furniture, an annoying color, or a design detail.

The moment we become aware of a disturbing noise, we act immediately and turn down the volume or, if possible, switch it off. We ask people to lower their voices if they are too loud, and we shut the door when outside noise is too much. When it comes to visually disruptive elements, however, we often allow them to continue and do nothing about them for ages.

Ask yourself whether there are things around the house that get on your nerves in a visual sense. You’ll be amazed at how wonderful it feels once you’ve disposed of them. It may be the ugly vase that you find irritating every time you see it, but you keep it only so you won’t upset the relation who gave it to you. Or the bowl that lives in the cupboard and comes out only at Christmas to please your mother.

If you consciously or unconsciously think negative thoughts about an object every time you catch sight of it, then it’s time to sell it or give it away. Try to make sure you keep things only that give you a boost and make you feel better. And that is equally true of the things usually hidden away in cupboards.

The Camera Trick

If you want to see your home with new eyes, try using the camera on your cell phone. I mentioned it earlier, in the section about focal points (see [this page](#)), but it bears repeating. When I look at an interior taken through the lens, I feel as if I’m seeing it much more clearly than in real life. It may be that a photo makes it easier to focus on one piece at a time rather than observing the whole room.

I can’t explain why, but things that seem fuzzy and ill-defined in reality suddenly become utterly obvious in a still photo. It’s as if the camera helps us see what the naked eye is unable to pick out.

I also use the cell phone as an aide-mémoire when I’m working on design projects for clients—and it’s just as useful when you are working on your own project. The point is that even though you see it every day, it isn’t easy to remember all the areas and alternatives when you are making your decisions in the store, especially when you find something unexpected and have to make a snap judgment as to whether it will fit in or not. So it’s worth having an album on your cell phone with photos of every room, or at least of the rooms you are actively working on or feel you have problems with.

Give It a Try

Take out your cell phone, clean the lens, and take at least five shots during daylight of every room. One should be an overview, one a “reality shot,” by which I mean a photo looking at a specific area—for instance, that problem wall behind the television. The rest can be close-ups of shelves or areas where you want to study the detail. Keep all of these photos in one album so that you can get at them quickly. Then, when you have the time, you can analyze the photos room by room. What does the composition feel like? Are you using the rule of thirds? Can you adopt the 60/30/10 + S approach (read more about it in chapter 4, [this page](#))? Have you achieved a good and appropriate rhythm in your design? Does anything need to be added or taken away in order to meet the odd-numbers rule (see [this page](#))?

4

Colors

Regardless of the design aesthetic we are following or the budget we are working with, the colors we choose are decisively important in defining how a home is perceived. These decisions (or nondecisions) outweigh almost everything else in interior design, which may explain why some people have such a problem choosing colors for their interiors. There are those who want as little color as possible, whereas others can't imagine life without colors, patterns, and wallpapers. Whichever type you happen to be, there are strategies to help with the choice of colors. In this chapter I've attempted to simplify and explain the most basic things you need to know in order to help you decide on your individual choices.

The Challenge of Color

Many of us who feel secure in terms of design suddenly lose confidence when it comes to color. "Help! How can I get more color into my home without taking the risk of it annoying me after a while?" Over my years as a blogger, I've had hundreds of questions like that from readers who have failed to make the right color choice for a room or, indeed, for their home. And I've had exactly the same feeling: many are the times I've tried something and it hasn't worked, until eventually I found the palette that works for me.

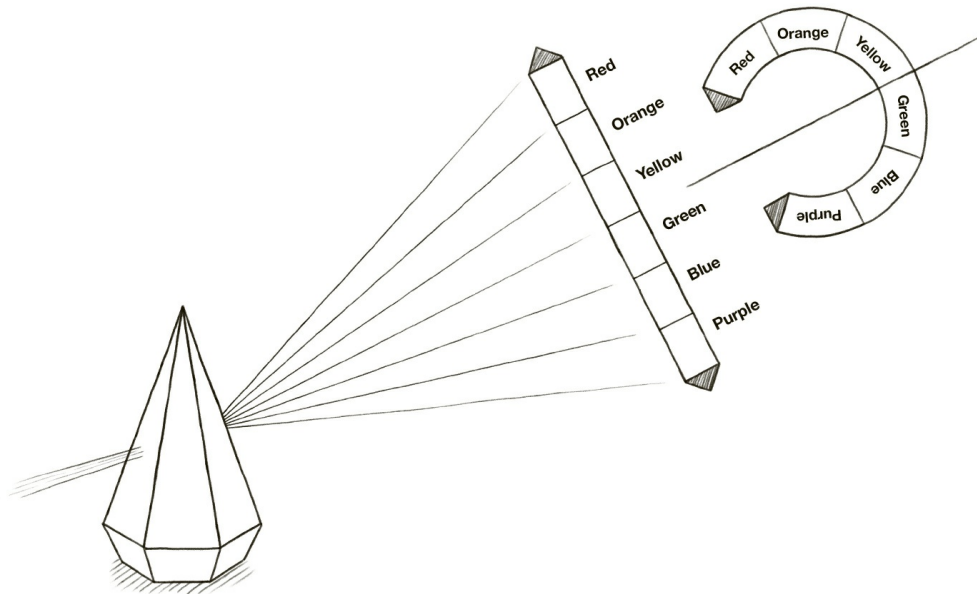
Color is probably the most relative thing we have to deal with when designing interiors. For a start, we all experience color slightly differently, but there is also the fact that the surroundings can affect the perception of the same range of colors in radically different ways. Daylight, evening light, furniture, the color of the floor, the kind of lighting—these are just some of the many factors that can cause the same color in the same room to appear different. In addition to which, every one of us is carrying our own baggage of memories and associations.

So we have to accept that it takes time and patience to find the colors we really like and want to live with, but success—finding the perfect palette for you—is very rewarding. And once you've identified the colors you really like, based on your own preferences rather than the transient fashion of the day, you'll be that much more sales-resistant and less likely to buy the wrong things. Which is a bonus in itself!

A Note About Color

It was the scientist Sir Isaac Newton who laid the foundation for our modern understanding of color: he shone a beam of white light through a prism in his laboratory, and it resolved into the colors of the rainbow on the other side. He then used another prism to refract the colors back to white. This is the principle behind the Newton color wheel, and his discovery helped us understand both the nuances of color and the connection between light and color.

These days there are a number of different color circles and color systems, and they differ slightly depending on the principle on which they are based.



Additive or Optical Color Mixing

The RGB system, for example, is used digitally for television and computer screens. (RGB are the initial letters of the colors red, green, and blue.)

Subtractive Color Mixing

CMYK, for example, is the color model used in the print industry. (CMYK are the initial letters of the primary colors cyan, magenta, yellow, and key—usually

black.)

Perception Based System

The NCS (Natural Color System) is based on how humans see colors. It works on the visual characteristics of the colors instead of on physical characteristics such as the composition of pigments or the light rays. The NCS elementary colors are yellow, red, blue, green, white, and black. You can read more about the NCS patented color system on the firm's home page (ncscolour.com). A Swedish standard, it's used—among other things—for the colors of paint.

To explain how a color wheel can be built and interpreted, I have used a model based on Johannes Itten's historical model. It's often used to illustrate how to mix pigments in art, and even if it does not always work fully in practice, it is relatively easy to understand. It is well worth your while to find and study further information on the particular color system relevant to your project.

Primary Colors

Red

Blue

Yellow

If you mix two primary colors, you can produce the secondary colors: purple, green, and orange.

Secondary Colors

Red + blue = purple

Blue + yellow = green

Yellow + red = orange

If you mix a primary color with the nearest secondary color in the color wheel, you produce six tones known as tertiary colors.

Tertiary Colors

Red-purple

Blue-purple

Blue-green

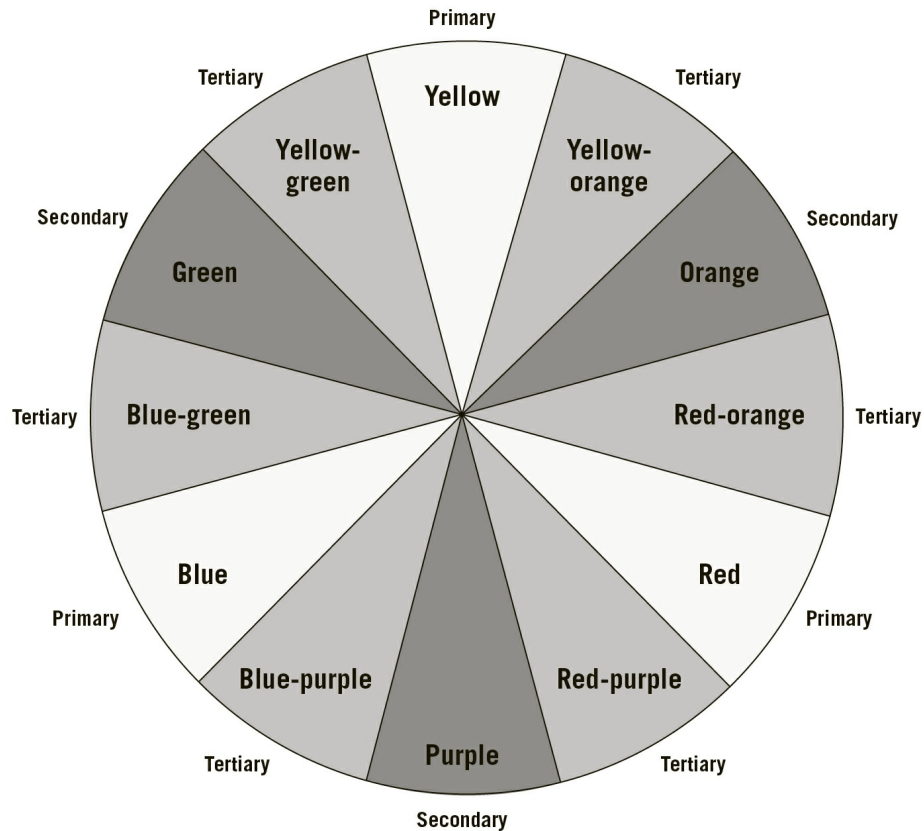
Yellow-green

Yellow-orange

Red-orange

The Color Wheel

The color wheel contains these twelve colors and shows their relationships to one another. The color wheel also gives us a good picture of which colors go well together and which tend to compete (i.e., those on opposite sides of the circle, known as contrasting or complementary colors).



Neutral Colors

White, black, and gray are usually called neutral colors, but they actually have no place in the color wheel. By adding these pigments to the primary, secondary, and tertiary colors, it is possible to create a vast range of tones.

Complementary Colors

When you look at the circle, certain colors are directly opposite one another; these are known as complementary colors—examples are yellow and purple, blue and orange, and red and green. The effect of combining two complementary colors is to reinforce each other: red appears redder (stronger) when combined with green than with yellow, for instance.

Warm Colors and Cold Colors

The colors from yellow to red in the color wheel are usually considered to be warm, whereas the colors from blue to green are considered to be cold. I should perhaps add, at the risk of making the whole business a little confusing, that there can actually be both warm and cold variants of the warm and cold colors. A red shade can have a good deal of yellow in it and is then perceived as being warm (think of orange, a yellow shade with a lot of red in it), but it can also contain a lot of blue, in which case it is considered to be colder (think of a wine-red). It is the same with green, which can be perceived as warm if it contains a lot of yellow (think of olive green), whereas it will be perceived as cold if it has a great deal of blue in it.

What Is a Color Scheme?

The phrase *color scheme* is one that is used rather loosely, on the assumption that everyone knows what it means. But that is not always the case, so it might be helpful to give a simple definition.

A color scheme does not simply mean choosing a range of colors for surfaces, floors, and paint on the walls; it involves the conscious choice of the colors of your home in everything from furniture to fabrics to minor accessories and details. Interior designers and stylists rarely work with just one color; instead, they usually propose a palette of colors that, taken together, will achieve the desired feel or style.

That is the approach you should take when deciding about different phases of your design project. The paint store may be able to lend you a color wheel, which will show the whole range of colors you have to choose from, or you can take home the small color cards that are available. If you want to test how a color will look with the furniture or the light in your home, you can probably buy small sample pots of paint. You should do the same with fabrics and textiles; they need to be seen in the surroundings in which they will be used. Since the furniture in a room, along with its colors, the lighting, and the quality of daylight, will all have an effect on

how a color is perceived, it's important to see the color in its real home environment before making your decisions.

Color Codes

Designers, decorators, artists, and manufacturers have always tried to systematize, chart, and name colors and their variants in order to be able to communicate different shades. Every manufacturer uses different names for their color mixes. When designers and stylists talk about color codes, they mean the particular color mix or formula used to produce a specific shade.

Color System

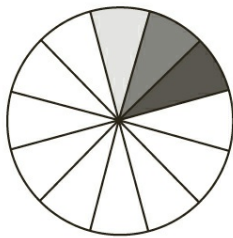
One of the most commonly used color coding systems in interior design contexts is the Natural Color System (NCS). Developed in Sweden, NCS is used worldwide by the color industry, materials manufacturers, architects, and designers. In the case of colors used for design details and fabrics, the Pantone system is often used, and in the case of metals, the European RAL color matching system is the standard.

Always keep a note of...

- The exact color codes for the walls you have painted. Write them down and keep them in your household file.
- Leftover paints. Store the paints in well-sealed containers in a warm environment so that you can touch up and hide any holes or blemishes.

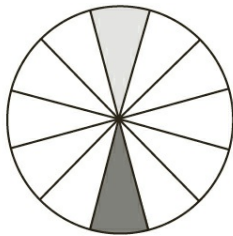
Color Palettes

You can use the color wheel as a guide when deciding on the color palette for your home, but here are a number of shortcuts to several of the most common color scheme principles. Remember that the results will vary depending on which color system you decide to use.



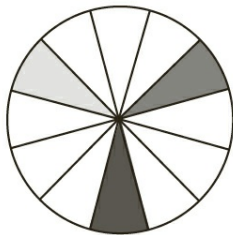
Analogous Color Palettes

Choose a color on the color wheel and work with its neighboring colors. An analogous color palette is usually relatively easy to decide on, so it is a good approach if you are unsure of yourself.



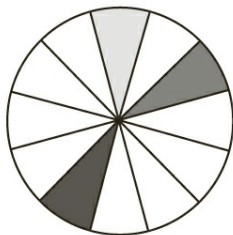
Complementary Color Palettes

Choose a color on the color wheel and then find its complementary color on the opposite side of the circle.



Triad Color Palettes

The triadic approach selects three main colors that are evenly spaced around the circle. This gives you greater color variation to work with, but it can be a little complicated.

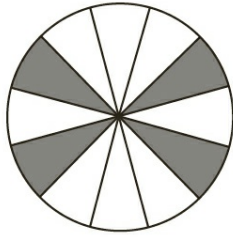


Split Complementary Color Palettes

Choose a color on the circle and combine it with the two colors that are adjacent to its complementary color.

Rectangular Color Palettes

Choose a color and its complementary color. Select a second color two steps away from your first color and then add its complementary color.



right color codes.

The Work of Art Approach

A quick way to come up with ideas for a more advanced color scheme is to choose a wallpaper or painting you like as your starting point. This is a really useful tip for beginners who lack an intuitive sense of which colors will work together, since the artist has already done the work for them!

What you do is this: Start with the color scheme in a painting or wallpaper that appeals to you. (It doesn't need to be a picture or wallpaper you intend to use in the room, though that would really be the icing on the cake.) Analyze the colors and the proportions in order to pick out clues as to color combinations, different shades, and the proportions between these things. Photograph the painting and use a web service (such as imagecolorpicker.com, printkick.com/tools/image-colour-match, or askval.com/photomatch) to help you identify the colors, or take the picture to a paint store and ask them to help you find the

The Encyclopedia of Nature

Artwork and wallpaper can certainly provide you with ideas about color combinations, but the natural world is also a veritable encyclopedia of color schemes. Study the detail of a butterfly's wing, a slice through a tree trunk, or the shades of gray on a rock or boulder and you will find clues and ideas about color combinations that will work. There is some truth in the tired old cliché that creators and designers take their inspiration from nature. So lace up your boots and go for a walk in the forest or on the mountain, at the seashore, or wherever you like best, and look for ideas there.

These days there are clever technical solutions to help you find the exact color codes of an object or a photo. Do an Internet search using terms such as *scan color codes* or *color measurement*, and you will certainly find further information about current aids and apps.

The 60/30/10 + S Formula

Many of the people who want more color in their homes find that the various color details they add stand out rather than blend in. If you scatter a couple of colorful pillows on a white sofa, for instance, they tend to behave like difficult guests and take over the whole show rather than join in with the rest of the furnishings. In the end, you can't stand them any longer and get rid of them, which is precisely the wrong thing to do: instead of removing them, you should add to them. Colorful pillows need colorful companionship, and the room, in this case chalk white, needs more shades to act as a bridge between the white and the contrasting details. By augmenting and spreading things around rather than subtracting and replacing, you can achieve a very different effect, which—to exaggerate a little—we could call a "color scheme formula."

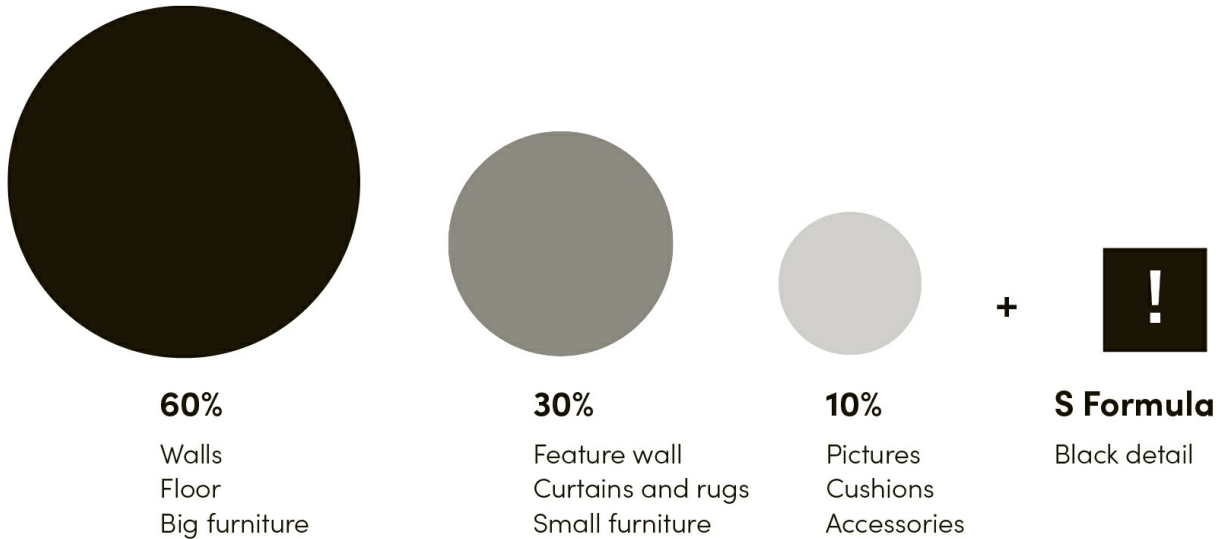
One approach, known as the 60/30/10 + S model, takes the proportions of the golden ratio as its starting point. If you feel you've hit a wall when trying to work out the color scheme for a room, this model proves useful, since it separates the colors into harmonious blocks and creates balance between the various colors and shades in the scheme. It prevents, for instance, the whole thing becoming focused on a couple of pillows, as in the case mentioned previously. A rough comparison might be the distribution of colors when someone is wearing a suit:

- 60 percent comprises the jacket, pants, and vest.
- 30 percent is the shirt.
- 10 percent is the tie and pocket handkerchief.

The Proportions and Distribution of the Color Palette

We can use the same approach in a room by distributing the colors as follows:

- 60 percent of the room will be in one or two main colors.
- 30 percent of the room will be in subtle and harmonious (i.e., not contrasting) accent colors, the purpose of which is to lift the main color(s).
- 10 percent of the room will be spiced up with one or two contrasting colors.
- + S stands for one small black detail, which is necessary to give vigor to the chosen colors. The black helps bring out the colors we have selected—it's the icing on the cake, so to speak.



You don't have to be a fan of strong colors in order to use this model, as it works just as well with muted or single-color interiors, in which case the proportions refer to shades and tones of the one color.

White or Gray Interiors for Novices

Some of us love white, gray, and neutral colors and feel good with them. Other people choose them just to play it safe when they can't decide what they might like instead. If you belong to the latter group, you are probably in need of a little guidance when starting on a color scheme for your white or neutral gray home. Dagny Thurmann-Moe has a good tip for novices who want to proceed cautiously when it comes to colors: since white, gray, and black are not included in the color wheel, any color added to a white or gray base will be experienced as a strong contrast. So, as a start, the simplest thing to do is to add green plants and plain wood in order to soften the colorless effect and open it up to other colors and shades. Then, as a shortcut, paint the walls of the room in a slightly off-white color so that the other colors automatically harmonize more easily.

The simplest color to start with is one of the three main colors of the natural world: green, blue, or brown. There is a useful rule of thumb that states that almost anything will go with these colors, because no colors look ugly against the forest, sky, and earth. These three colors will bring more vibrancy and nuance to the neutral white or gray base you already have, and they will make it more beautiful. So, if you start with one of these three colors, you can feel sure that they will go with the color or colors you already have and that the introduction of colors into your home will be successful.

If you want to make life even simpler, you can start with a shade of one of these three colors with a little white or gray pigment mixed into it. This will make for a gentler and more harmonious transition to and contrast with your white, gray, or black area.

The most common mistake people make when creating their own color schemes is to be too tentative and consequently use too few colors in too few parts of the room. You might, for instance, have a white sofa and a gray floor and think that putting two blue cushions on the sofa and a couple of blue candles on the coffee table will be sufficient enough to introduce more color, but the effect is likely to be very two-dimensional and overly neat. The key is to make the color scheme harmonious without anything feeling overmatched. A complete color scheme might therefore consist of between seven and nine colors or shades in the proportions of the 60/30/10 + S formula. Instead of choosing the same blue-green accent color everywhere, you could use varying shades of blue-green pillows, perhaps a deeper blue candle, and a little wood. Do that and you'll be home free!

The Color Code Trap

One of the most frequently asked questions on Instagram is "What is the color code?" It's easy enough to answer, but I would prefer to *explain* why you shouldn't get stuck in the color code trap when choosing color for your walls.

We can start by defining two important concepts: *inherent* or *nominal color*, which is the color we paint with as defined by the manufacturer, and *perceived color*, which is the color we see.

The factors that affect the perceived color include the colors in the surrounding area (furniture, walls, floors, decor), the sources of light in the room (including its strength and temperature), and daylight itself, which has different qualities depending on compass direction. The difference between nominal color and perceived color is known as the *color shift*.

I would argue that the most important influence on color shift is daylight, since it is rarely exactly the same from one building to another. We can reproduce many factors, but not the position of the windows, the location of the house, and the movement of light in a room throughout the day or season of the year—these are all pretty well unique. Rooms with windows to the north are generally considered to feel colder, whereas rooms with windows to the south are often felt to be warmer.

That means that a color with the identical code can appear different at your house than at mine.

Choosing the Right Level of Gloss

When you think about painting your home, the choice of color is not the only decision to be made. To ensure your desired result, it is important to choose the right level of gloss. Surprisingly few people take this into consideration when asking about color codes, yet colors with a matte surface are very different from those with gloss.

A black color with a matte finish will never be really black. Black needs some gloss in order to give it depth.

The surface finish of a color is measured in gloss units on a scale from 1 to 100, where 1 corresponds to flat matte and 100 corresponds to very high gloss. Matte surfaces absorb light, which means that a color on the low gloss scale will appear darker. Gloss surfaces, on the other hand, reflect ambient light much more and therefore appear lighter. A glossy surface will also appear to be a stronger color, since it reproduces the color better than a matte surface, which absorbs the light that is necessary for our eyes to perceive colors.

Matte Wall

Advantage: More forgiving and better for concealing blemishes. Gives a calmer surface without sheen.

Disadvantage: Not so durable; more easily stained or scratched. Can be difficult to wipe clean.

Gloss Wall

Advantage: Easier to keep clean and wipe. Reflects light and brightens things up.

Disadvantage: Irregularities show up much more with gloss paint than with matte.

The Gloss Scale

- **High Gloss (GL90–100):** For woodwork, metal, and surfaces where there is heavy wear and a lot of dirt.
- **Gloss (GL60–89):** Usually used on floors and cupboard doors, this gloss is less common today. Water-based paint cannot achieve the same level of gloss as solvent-based paint (i.e., turpentine or white spirit).
- **Semigloss (GL30–59):** Good for floors, furniture, and woodwork such as doors, windows, frames, and linings.
- **Semimatte (GL11–29):** Often used on walls where there is a risk of stains—especially in the kitchen, hall, and children’s room, for instance. Easily wiped clean.
- **Matte (GL6–10):** Will require a certain amount of cleaning—how much will vary depending on the brand.
- **Flat Matte (0–5):** Used on surfaces that you want to be free of reflection, such as ceilings, for instance (except in kitchens and bathrooms).

Some Examples

- Remember that the darker the color you choose, the glossier it will seem if you select a high gloss number.
- Paints for a bathroom have to be both watertight and water-repellent. Tanking, applying a waterproof sealant, will be necessary if the result is to be guaranteed, so you should consult with your paint supplier to help you make the right choice.
- Paint for radiators must be heat resistant.
- One-component (1K) paint is suitable for concrete floors that experience moderate wear; two-component (2K) paint consists of a base paint and hardener and is recommended for floors that endure hard wear and need to be more durable. Gloss scale should be in the range of 50 to 90.
- Some manufacturers make washable paints as low as gloss scale 5 for walls and woodwork. Your supplier will be able to advise you.



Always test a color before you paint the wall! I don't recommend the traditional spot test, when you paint several colors alongside one another. When you see them all together, deciding between one color and another becomes more difficult. Paint the test sample on a wooden board or a pizza carton and hold it up to the wall you are going to paint. It is important to look at the color test at the right light angle. Don't forget to give the test two coats of paint so that there is proper coverage and an accurate result. Do you use the room mostly in the day or mostly in the evening? Whichever it is, choose the color in the light conditions you most commonly experience in that room.

Metamerism

Metamerism is the phenomenon where two colors can be perceived as being the same color under one light source but as completely different under a different light. It is just as important to bear this in mind when choosing fabrics as when choosing the paint for your walls. If you're going to invest in a sofa, you should request a sample of the fabric so you can view it in the light conditions the sofa will live in. Items such as upholstered furniture with fabric covers are usually ordered well in advance and have a lengthy delivery time. If you decide on a fabric only in shop lighting, there is a considerable risk you will be disappointed when the sofa is delivered to you. Good furniture retailers have test swatches of fabric you can take home. Or you can ask to borrow a pillow from the sofa.

Choosing White

White walls may seem the simplest choice for anyone not used to dealing with colors, but there are many shades of white, and, moreover, white is a color very easily

influenced by what is around it.

Off-white paints are more common than pure white, and they can introduce either a touch of warmth or coolness. Which direction you choose to move in will depend on the result you're trying to achieve, the light conditions in the room you are painting, and the atmosphere you are trying to create. There is also the question of which colors you want to combine with the particular white you have chosen.

When you look at magazine illustrations of interiors, you need to be aware that photos are rarely accurate when it comes to shades of white. The white balance of the camera may have been adjusted to trick the eye and level out different shades of white in the same photo in order to produce a more uniform spread in a magazine. And the paper on which the magazines and brochures are printed may show through and affect photographic reproduction.

Warm and Cool

The white paint you buy is not pure chalky white, because that would give too much glare. The merest touch of black is often mixed in, as is a pigment to add a warm or cool touch in order to balance our perception of the painted area. White with the addition of a cold pigment works best when put with other cold tones, such as blue, turquoise, and violet, or with cold metals such as silver and zinc. The opposite is true of a warm pigment, which will go best with warm colors such as red, orange, and yellow, and with warm metals such as gold and brass.

Neutral White—Color Code S 0500-N

This is sometimes called chalk white, although, in fact, it is not actually so. It contains 5 percent black, but it does not contain the yellow pigment that has been standard in white paint and white varnished furniture for many years. It is consequently perceived more as a neutral white.

Stockholm White—Color Code S 0502-Y

Stockholm white was reportedly named for the light, fresh style that was dominant in inner-city Stockholm during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Painters added a little pigment to the white in the belief that it provided better coverage and would stay fresh longer. Given the touch of yellow pigment, critics thought there was a risk it would be perceived as nicotine stained. Fans of the color code, however, believe that the warmth in this shade of white is its strong point.

Window White—RAL 9010

Metal windows often use the white color RAL 9010, which has a slight yellowish-white tone. Since RAL 9010 uses a different color scale than the NCS scale, experts argue whether S 0502-Y is the wall color that comes closest to RAL 9010, but some people claim it is a little whiter than Stockholm white. A matter of taste, but worth knowing.

Ceiling White—Color Code S 0300-N

White paint for the ceiling is usually a whiter shade than that used on the walls. The usual color code for the ceiling is S 0300-N (which means it has only 3 percent black in it), the principle being that the ceiling should be lighter than the walls in order to “lift” the room. On the gloss scale, ceiling paint is usually flat matte (GL3).

Standard White for Moldings and Woodwork

Factory-painted moldings, door frames, and internal doors are usually varnished in NCS S 0502-Y, a white that used to be called standard white. For many years this was also the standard white used on IKEA furniture. Since it contains five units of black and two units of yellow, this white has a touch of warmth, which causes problems for people who want chalk white or cold gray walls in their homes. If you paint chalk white alongside these standard varnished architraves, they bring out the worst in one another: the architraves look yellow and the walls look bluish-white.

These days there is a greater choice of color available among white factory-painted products, but it does call for a greater level of awareness. You do not want to make the mistake of choosing different shades of white for doors, architraves, painted walls, and mass-produced furniture.

To prevent clashing shades of white, you need to keep all this in mind before choosing white paint for your home and the elements of your design. And if you have white electrical switches and sockets, they, too, have to be taken into consideration, since they might clash with the white used on the walls.

White in Different Compass Directions

The daylight in rooms with north-facing windows is often slightly blue, which means that white walls can be perceived as having a mauve or violet tinge. If you choose an off-white that has a touch of yellow in a room with bluish light, the combination can cause the white to take on a slightly green tone. The light in rooms with a southern outlook is warmer. If you don't want a warm white feeling on the walls, you can balance the daylight by choosing a white that contains a small amount of a colder pigment, such as blue or green.



Remember that it's not only daylight and compass direction that affect the shade of white you perceive on your white-painted walls. The artificial light in the room and the color and material of the floor will also have an effect. Wooden floors with a yellowish tinge—oak, pine, and birch, for instance—can reinforce the yellow feel of white paint that contains a yellow pigment.

Wallpaper

Wallpaper, like paint, is an effective way to create moods and visual effects in a room. International suppliers offer an enormous range of everything from single-color papers to a multitude of patterned papers. Wallpaper can help give walls structure, both optical and physical. There are papers with linen patterns that can fool the eye into assuming the wall is covered with fabric, and there are tactile papers with raised weave or seagrass that have a rough surface you can feel with your hand.

Tips and Rules of Thumb

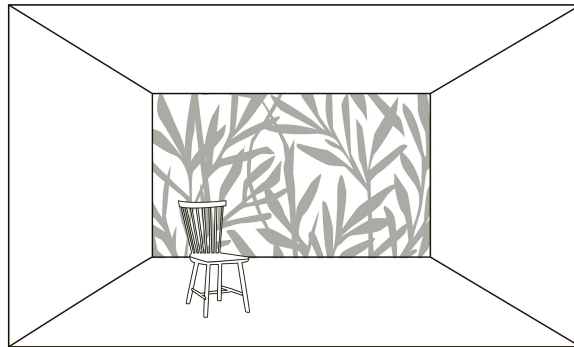
Your starting point for patterned wallpaper should be the architecture and period of the house. Whether you intend to follow the style and age of your home or to be bold and go against them, it is wise to be aware of the patterns and forms that were current when the house was designed. Every period has styles and patterns typical of the time, and you can often choose between the classic wallpapers themselves and new interpretations of characteristic patterns.

The size of a room or the area of the wall can be good pointers when it comes to choosing a pattern. There is an old rule of thumb that says “Small room, small pattern; large room, large pattern.” It’s based on the idea that large patterns often need more room to do justice to themselves, whereas large patterns in small rooms may feel pruned. My feeling is that this advice should be taken with a grain of salt, since the open-plan layout common today can easily feel messy if every wall is papered with large patterns. The forms on small-patterned papers have a tendency to merge together when viewed from a distance; consequently they tend to create a calm background that can help highlight and emphasize individual objects (a lamp or piece of furniture, for instance). Large patterns, on the other hand, tend to overwhelm objects, because the patterns themselves are often much bolder than the design accessories that stand in front of them. If you choose a paper with large patterns, you will probably have to be bolder in your choice of furniture and design accessories in order to create balance.

It is important, however, not to choose the paper simply on the basis of pattern size. The number of different colors on the wallpaper also influences the overall effect: the more colors, the more complex the overall pattern becomes. If you are not used to working with wallpaper, or if you have family members unconvinced by the desirability of papering a particular room, it’s a good idea to cut down on the contrasts by choosing a less bold paper with muted colors and patterns based on a monochromatic color scheme. On the other hand, if you are on the lookout for a wallpaper that grabs attention, it’s time to put away the sample books of monochrome or single-color papers and focus on stronger colors and color differences.



When trying to form an impression of a pattern, it’s important to step back (mentally) and not stare at one small sheet of paper until you can’t see anything else—you must try to imagine the effect of the pattern when repeated across the whole wall. Images on the Internet can be a great help here, since you can sometimes find walls papered with a particular pattern, which allows you to see it in context.



Wallpaper with a large pattern tends to draw attention to itself. It becomes the main feature of the room and overwhelms furniture placed in front of it.



In wallpapers with small patterns, there is a tendency for the patterns to flow and merge. The wallpaper then becomes more of a background for the furniture placed in front of it.

Changing the Tempo Between Rooms

If you are intending to paper the whole house or apartment, it’s worth remembering what has been said about lines of sight: which rooms are visible simultaneously? It’s also important to pay attention to the choice or choices of wallpaper you have made in the past, because the overall feel of your home will be impacted from the effect of the wallpapers you have used throughout your home. When we walk through an apartment or house, we carry our impressions from one room to the next room as we go. (This holds true irrespective of whether the layout is open-plan or the rooms are separate from one another.) This being so, it is a good idea to work consciously with changes of tempo, depending on the kind of rhythm you are trying to achieve.

To create a calmer tempo, for instance, you might allow a very strongly patterned wallpaper to transition into a wall of a single color in an adjoining room, or you

might choose to have a more formal vision in neighboring rooms before returning again to a more demanding pattern. If, on the other hand, your aim is to achieve a series of bold clashes, you can forget about transition and allow loud patterns to bounce off one another room after room.

It's all a matter of taste, of course, but it's worth thinking through rather than choosing each wallpaper for its own sake. Your choices should be conscious ones so that the result does not take you by surprise when the job is finally done and seen in its entirety.

Tips for Beginners

Choosing wallpaper can feel overwhelming if you are not used to working with color, but, for a beginner, a good starting point is to select quiet patterns with monochromatic color schemes. And remember, there is no need to wallpaper the whole room or to paper a room in which you spend most of your waking hours.

As you feel your way forward, the usual recommendation is to paper the smaller rooms or those parts of the house in which you don't spend much time. Start by papering a guest room, guest bathroom, or the back wall of a bedroom.

Feature wall: The papered or painted wall in a room where only one wall is treated.

Border: A narrow edging strip used to divide the wall into upper and lower sections. It is common to have different wallpapers above and below the border.

Wainscot: Wooden paneling used on the lower part of the wall, the upper part being papered or painted. The height of the wainscot can vary, but it usually follows the golden ratio, the break being most often at one-third or two-thirds height, and rarely at half height.

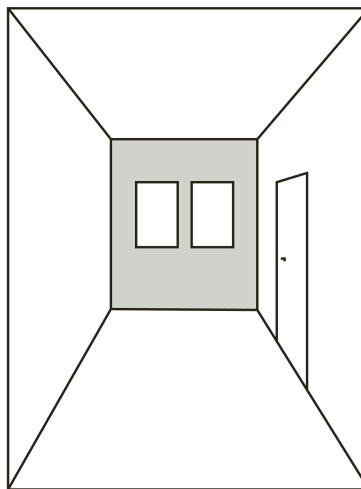
Visual Effects and Room Size

As with colors, it is possible to choose different wallpapers and patterns to create visual effects and thus trick the eye into feeling that a small room is bigger and airier than it is or that a large, echoing room is more intimate and welcoming. The same basic principles apply that were mentioned earlier: the width and direction of the lines on the wallpaper, the size of patterns, the choice of light or dark colors on the walls—all these things can help create an optical illusion.

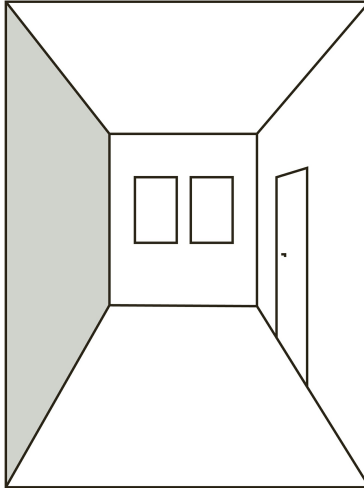
A Method for Successfully Mixing Patterns

If you want to combine patterned wallpaper, several different patterned fabrics, rugs, and furniture all in the same room, there are a number of things you can do to achieve a cohesive whole. What follows is one approach, but it's not an absolute rule.

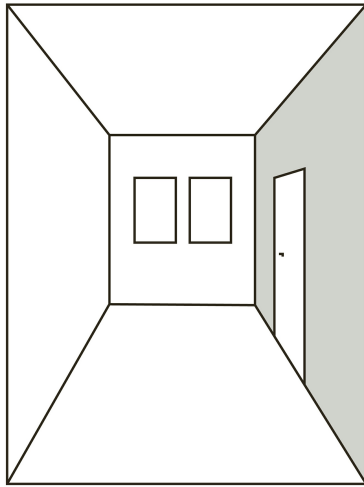
1. Start by identifying the largest surfaces on which patterns can be applied in the room. This usually means walls, big upholstered pieces of furniture such as sofas or armchairs, and large areas of fabric such as rugs, curtains, or bedcovers.
2. Now think of some of the smaller surfaces to which you can add patterns. These will vary depending on the usage of the room in question—they may be decorative pillows and lampshades or oven mitts, patterned dish towels, and trays.
3. Next, select the wallpapers and fabrics you want to combine. Try to find something in each of the three following categories: organic patterns (leafy, sweeping patterns); geometric patterns (formal, austere patterns); areas of a single color (balancing blocks of color).



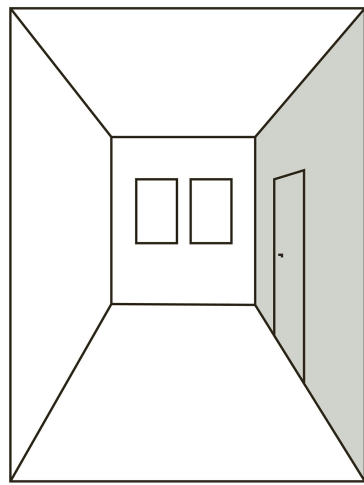
Little effect = smallest wall



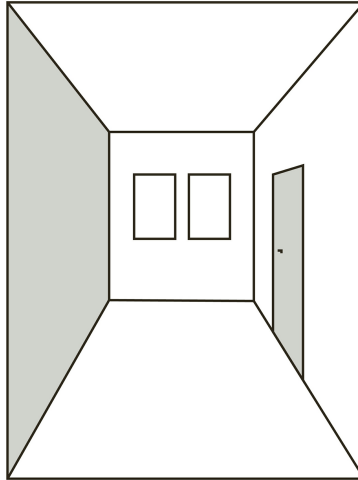
Big effect = largest wall and first impression



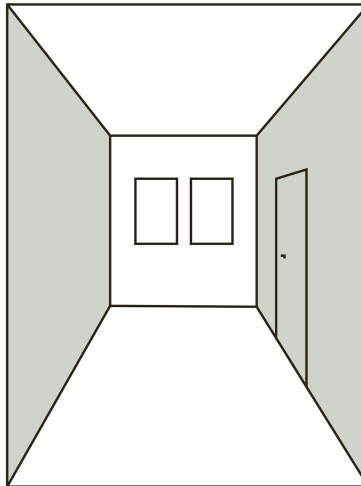
Contrasting effect = door and wall



The effect is to camouflage the door.



The effect is to accentuate the door.



The effect is to make the room narrower.

The dynamics of pattern mixing are usually improved by mixing pattern groups that are organic with those that are a little more formal. Remember the theory of juxtaposition discussed earlier (see [this page](#)): irregular, organic, and deep patterns alongside more formal, austere, and repeating patterns seem to lift and reinforce each other. If we use patterns of a similar shape, we will fail to achieve much in the way of contrast, and there is a risk that everything merges together.

If we then allow our chosen pattern mix to be balanced by a block of color, the overall experience will appear more harmonious to the eye. Select a favorite color from one of the patterns you have chosen, and let it come into its own on a large surface, such as a rug or a big piece of furniture. The knack of ensuring success with pattern mixing is to find which combinations of the three categories have the effect of lifting one another.

Examples of Organic or Leafy Patterns

- Foliage
- Flowers
- Irregular designs with birds and animals
- Toile de Jouy
- Paisley

Examples of Geometric / More Formal Patterns

- Geometrical shapes (e.g., triangles, squares, rectangles, rhomboids)
- Stripes
- Checks
- Houndstooth

When making your choice, take care to vary the size of the patterned structures to ensure that not all patterns have the same rhythm.

4. Once you have chosen the patterns you want to work with, the time has come to decide which of them will be the focus. Make one pattern or stylistic feature

the solo artist holding center stage, and let the rest function as a backup group. Generally speaking, big patterns function best on larger surfaces (walls, sofas, curtains, and places where the whole pattern is visible), whereas smaller and more detailed patterns work best on smaller surfaces.

5. Once you've done your planning, check that the pattern occurs in every part of the room. For a pattern mix to have a united effect, it is important that it is distributed around the whole interior rather than concentrated at a single point in the room. If you have used patterned wallpaper on a feature wall, ensure that there is something patterned at the other side of the room to balance it—this could be curtains, a large rug, a lampshade, or artwork.
6. Remember that Rome wasn't built in a day. Be patient and accept that it can take time to discover the exact pattern mix or style clash that you find most pleasing. If there is an item you really like but it disrupts the unity of the rest, move it to another room and wait patiently until you either find a mate for it or come up with a composition in which everything falls into place.

Shortcuts

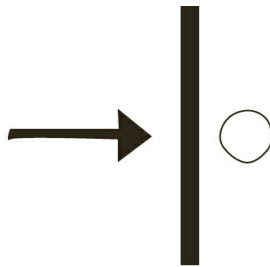
A good tip for beginners is to develop their pattern-mixing skills by initially choosing patterns with colors from the same color family. This means that contrasts will be softer as there is a common linking element already in place. By having one color recur in a number of different patterns, you can create calm in spite of the differences.

Another little trick is to work with patterns created by one designer. Even though creative designers often produce work for different companies, most have an individual design language that, in one way or another, shows through. If you have fallen for a particular pattern, it could be worthwhile to look into that designer's portfolio, as it may offer suitable ideas, combinations, and matches.

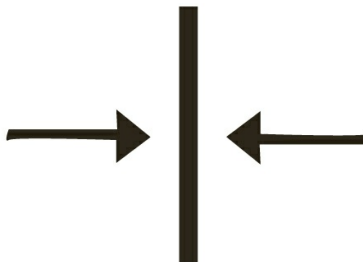
What Does "Pattern Repeat" Mean?

Wallpaper is printed in narrow rolls and, if you are papering a whole wall, it will take several strips of paper to cover it. You will need to pay attention to the design of the pattern to ensure that the strips match properly. Generally speaking, there are three types of pattern repeat, and these will affect both the appearance of the final result and how much waste will be left from the rolls—that, of course, will determine how many rolls you need to buy.

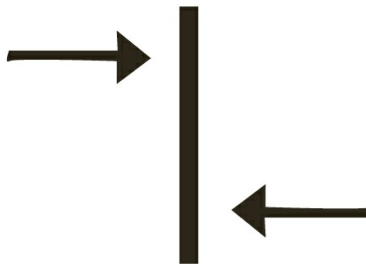
- **Random match:** In this case, there is no need to match a pattern from one roll to the next.
- **Straight-across match:** In this case, the pattern matches across the whole width of the roll.
- **Drop match:** In this case, the pattern is offset in order to create variation.



The wallpaper is random matched—no pattern match is needed.



The wallpaper has a straight-across match. All strips are cut in the same way.



The wallpaper has a drop match. There will be some extra waste.

Most wallpaper suppliers, both stores and online, will lend you pattern books and samples of paper, or you can inexpensively order samples. Take advantage of the offers! Daylight and lighting will affect your perception of a pattern, and the only way to discover how it will look in your home is to see it there. And remember to lean the sample against the wall or to tape it up so that you can see it in a vertical position.

Pictures on Wallpapered Walls

- Avoid creating competition. If a paper has a large pattern, it's usually best to use pictures with calmer, less bold motifs. On papers with small patterns, pictures with large motifs often work better.
- Accentuate the outer edges of the pictures by giving them bold frames.
- Use a mat board to insert a little space between the wallpaper and the motifs in the picture. It doesn't have to be white—there are black, gray, and colored alternatives that will stand out more clearly against a white or pale background.

Glossary of Color Terms

Primary Colors: Yellow, blue, red.

Secondary Colors: Colors resulting from mixing two primary colors—purple, green, orange.

Tertiary Colors: Colors resulting from mixing a primary color with one of its nearest secondary colors.

Complementary or Contrasting Colors: Colors that lie directly opposite each other in the color wheel. They create strong contrasts and reinforce each other.

Color: Is properly speaking the color we experience.

Nuance: A small change in color. Colors with the same nuance have the same amount of black, white, and color in them.

Monochrome: Single colored.

Pigment: What gives paint its color and coverage.

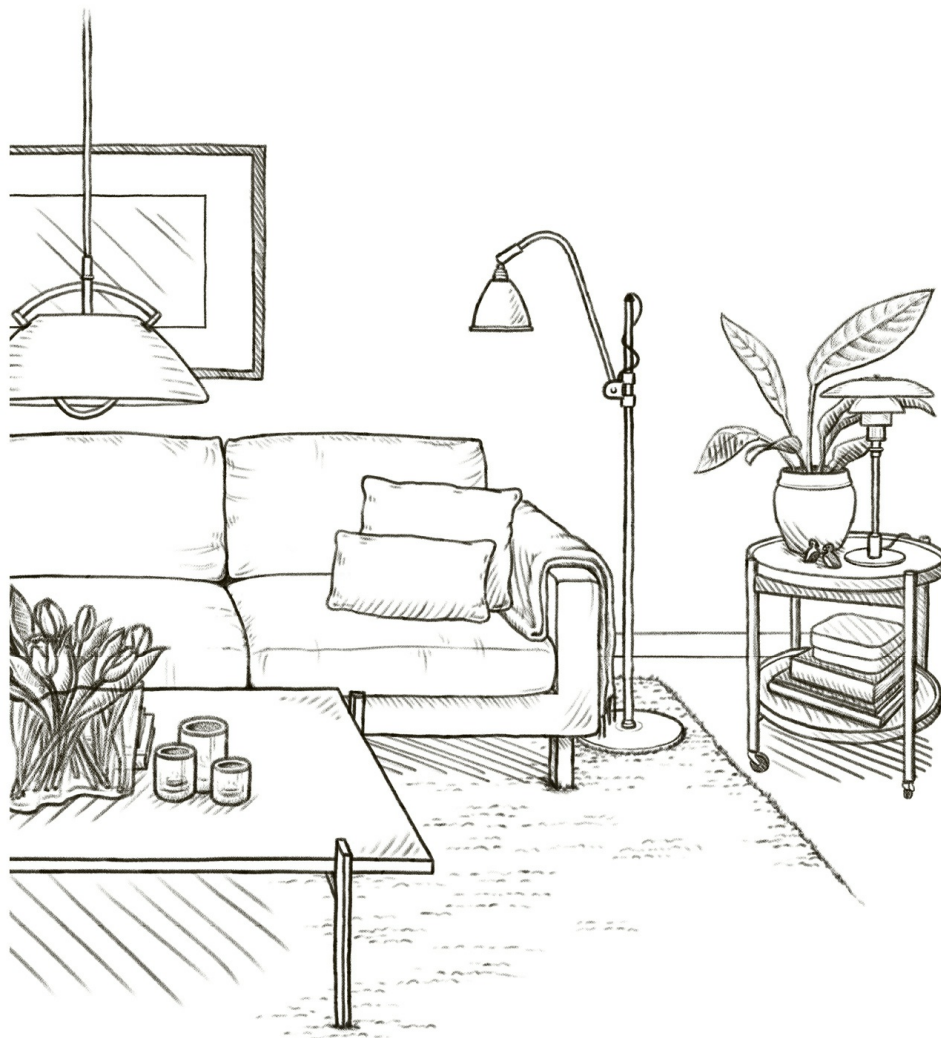
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Lighting

Just as paint and brushwork can be used to create a visual effect and mood in a room, we can use lighting for the same purpose. Where we place the lamps, where we direct the beams of light, and how we combine different strengths of light can both literally and metaphorically make a night-and-day difference in a room. In this chapter, I have brought together basic information about lighting with some design hints on how to work with it.

No Light, No Homeyness

The purpose of interior lighting is not exactly complicated—anyone who has sat through a blackout knows how quickly a room can change from being functional and cozy to chaotic and unpleasant. We need light in order to see properly, and, depending on how and where we position our lamps and the strength of the light they give, we can create mood and atmosphere in a room with it. We can emphasize the features we like and draw our eyes away from those we are less pleased with. In spite of all this, few people take the lighting aspects of an interiors project seriously, and instead they go out and buy lamps for all the wrong reasons. Why did you choose that particular lamp? Was it because you liked its shape, or was it because you wanted it to do a particular job? A good lamp is not just something to be looked at in its own right; its task is also to show the things around it in a better light.



Form or Function

“Does this lamp suit my style of interior design?” I receive more queries about the appearance of lamps than about their ability to do their job. When you are planning an interior and you reach the lighting stage, it is vital to consider both design and function. Which parts of the room need stronger lighting? What kind of

lighting do you need there, and what lamps are already in the room? You need more than one light to create a full lighting system, which is why it rarely pays to decide on one light fixture at a time without taking the others into consideration.

There is an enormous range of lamps to choose from these days, and yet the general understanding of lighting seems to remain rather elementary. In spite of the fact that past generations spent years researching non-glare lampshades and light fixtures kind to the eye, we still choose to hang naked bulbs on fabric cables simply because it is trendy. The right lamp seems to be more important than the right effect—and that is something I think we must change. Badly lit rooms are not only less pleasant; they can also cause eyestrain, and that can result in headaches and tiredness. Moreover, straining to see things in poor light makes concentration more difficult, and that in turn leads to impatience and a loss of energy. In other words, proper lighting is important not just because it enables us to see better but also because it makes us feel better.



A flat surface of light will not bring dynamism to a room, nor will it give any sense of defined space. In open-plan layouts, a well-directed beam of light can be as effective as a painted wall when it comes to creating a sense of distinct and separate spaces, particularly in the evening.

Amplify and Create Illusions

Using lamps to create light and shade in an interior allows you to accentuate and emphasize different parts of the room—or to hide them and create an illusion that makes the eye focus where you want. So lighting is not just there to help us see better in the dark; it is equally vital as a tool to accentuate and draw attention to what we like—a picture, a pretty detail on a bookcase, a piece of furniture. Or we may choose to aim a spotlight at some architectural detail or a particular wallpaper.



When you are in the store, it can be hard to see how light and shadows will fall from a lamp. Ask to take the lamp home, or study any photos that show the particular lamp in an interior to give you a feel for how it sheds light and what shadow effects it creates.

The 5-7 Rule

In terms of lighting, a good start is to plan on every room having at least five to seven lighting points, though some people recommend between seven and nine.

Go around the house and count them all. How many lamps do you have in each room, how strong are they, and how are they distributed? Do the lamps really do the job properly in the various rooms and positions they are in? Ideally, as well as counting the number of lamps in total, you should check off at least one lamp in each of the following categories. (If you miss one, think about which category of light is missing.)

General lighting / cleaning lighting: A ceiling lamp or light fixture that spreads ambient light over the whole room.

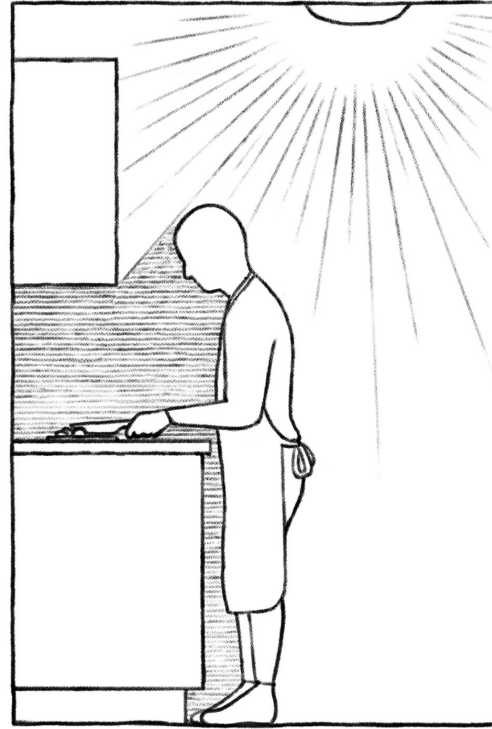
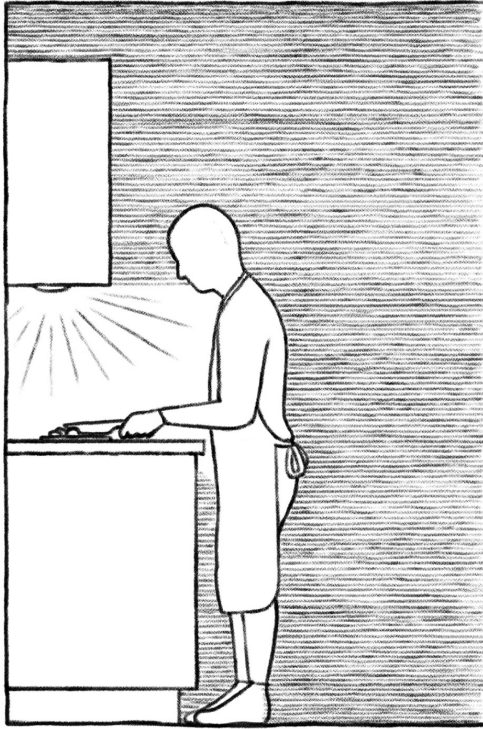
Work lighting / task lighting: A reading lamp by the armchair or sofa; lighting over work surfaces in the kitchen; a desk lamp.

Spot lighting: Accent lighting or spotlights directed at a wall of pictures, a work of art, a bookcase, or shadow play on the wall.

Atmospheric lighting / decorative lighting: Mood lighting, dimmable small lamps, string lights, candles.

Unwanted Shadows

Shadows can create atmosphere in a room, but they are unwelcome if they interfere with work lighting. When planning and installing lighting, always consider where people will be in the room. If the only source of light in the kitchen is on the ceiling diagonally behind the work surface, there is a risk that your shadow will fall on the surface in front of you when you are preparing food. If this is the case, you will need a light under the cabinet to enable you to see properly. The same situation may arise in other rooms—the craft room, the study, or the garage.



Indirect or Diffused Light

When deciding on the lighting for a room, it's important to create a balance between direct and indirect or diffused lighting. Lamps designed to create a directional beam provide direct light. If, however, the beam is filtered or spread through a shade, it is referred to as diffused light. If the source of light is bounced off a reflector or a wall in order to spread the light, it is called indirect lighting.

Direct Light: A directed beam of light.

Diffused Light: Light filtered through a shade.

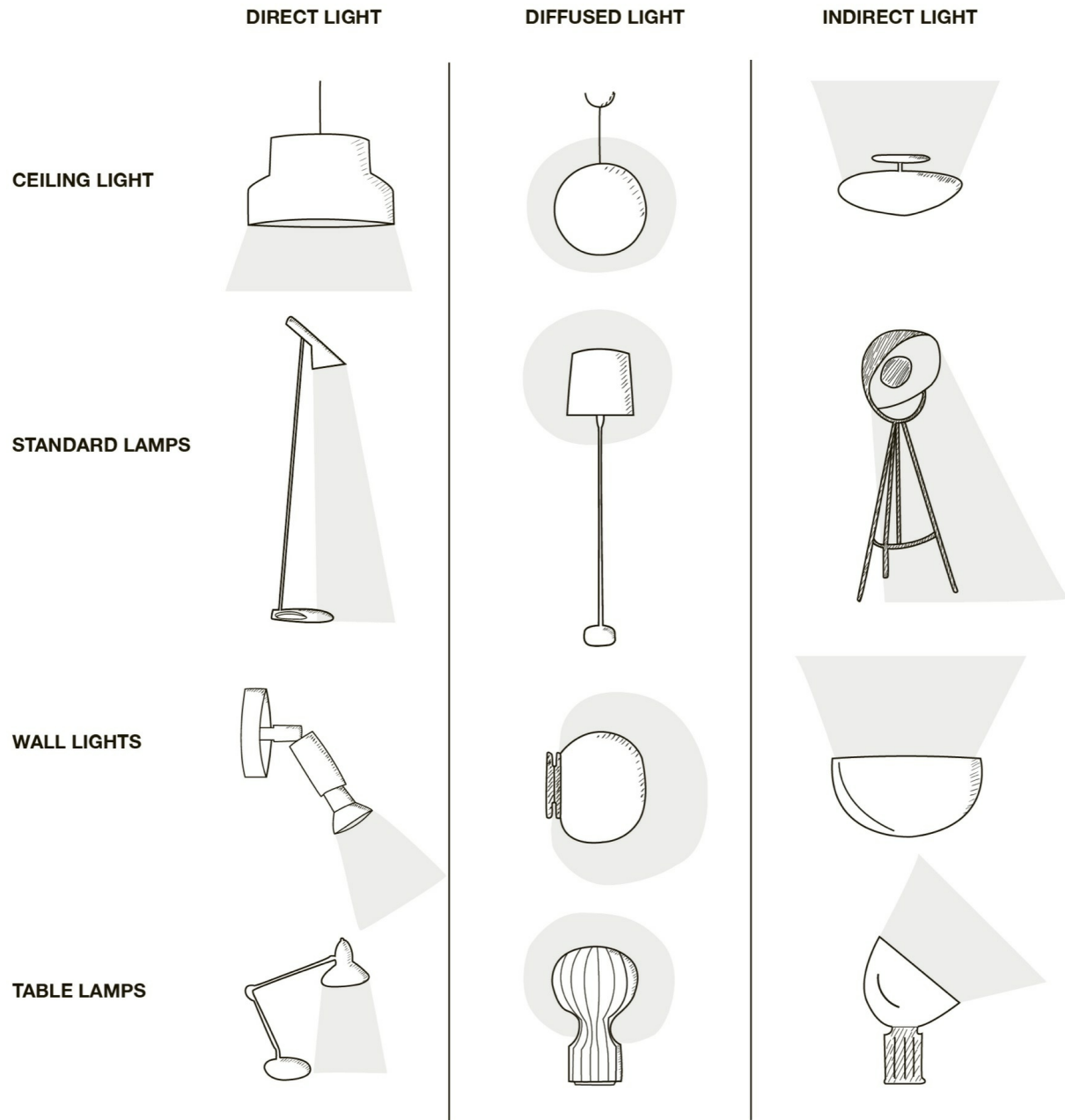
Indirect Light: Light reflected, for instance, off a wall.

Directional and Nondirectional

To put it very simply, lamps are either directional or nondirectional. Directional lighting provides direct light and is most suitable for functional and working purposes, whereas nondirectional light, either diffused or indirect, is better for atmospheric or decorative lighting. This is a useful approach to take when making a choice between different models and you are uncertain which of them is most suitable for your purposes. A standard lamp with a directed beam works best for reading a book or doing handiwork, but a standard lamp with the light filtered through a shade (white fabric or opaque glass, for instance) is better if what you want is decorative or atmospheric lighting to illuminate a dark corner.

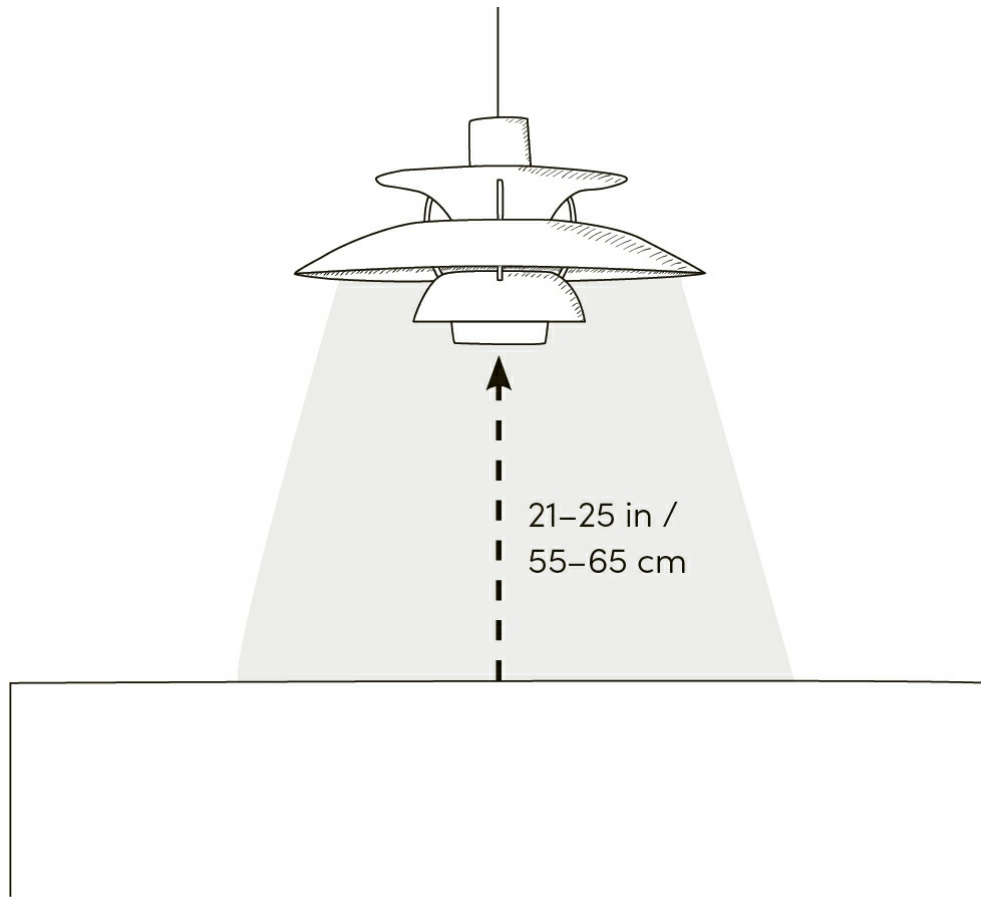
Points to Consider

- A dark shade will not allow as much light to penetrate as a lighter shade; the former will tend to shine the light either downward or downward and upward.
- A patterned or perforated shade spreads light more unevenly and can create light and shadow effects in a room.
- A colored lampshade may spread colored light. A red lampshade is likely to make the whole room red.
- If a colored fabric shade has a white lining, the light will be reflected off the white surface, and the effect of the external color will be diminished.

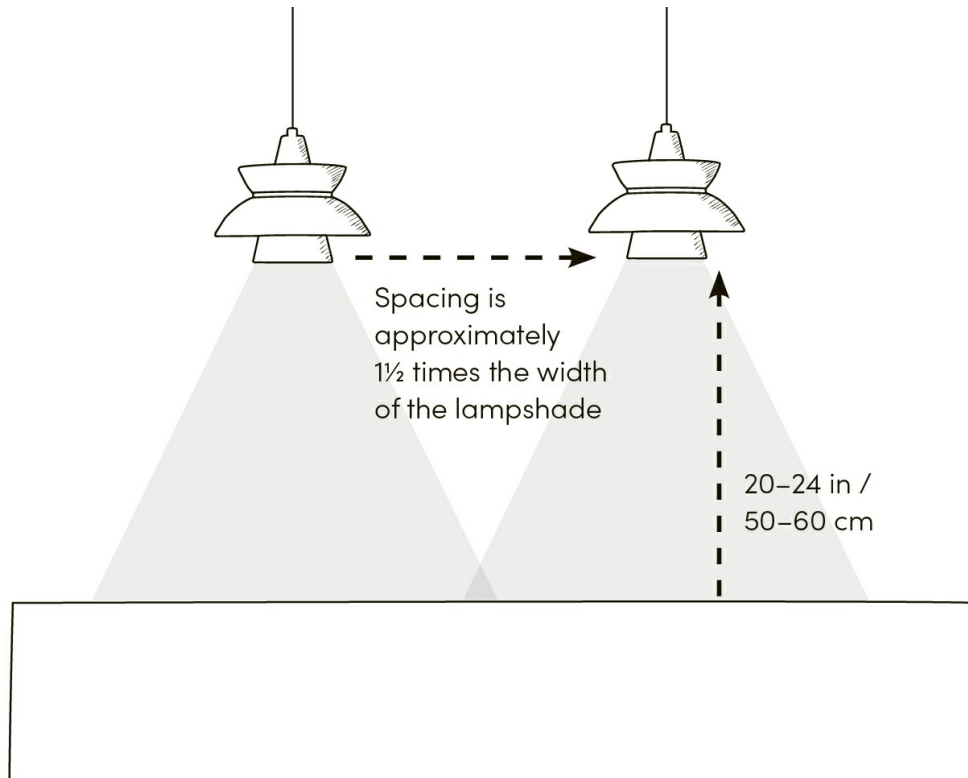


Glare-Free Lighting

In addition to the number of light sources in a room, a properly designed lighting system also considers the height of the lights. This is particularly important over the kitchen table. If the lamp is too high, there is a risk of it being too bright and intense for those sitting at the table. If the lamp hangs too far down, however, people are likely to bang their heads on the shade when standing up. A quick look at pictures in magazines and on social media will reveal how common it is for lamps to be too high or too low.



The optimal height of the lamp will depend on how high the bulb is within the shade. There is a greater risk of glare if the bulb is placed low.



Over the kitchen table, interior architects usually agree on a vertical height of 20 to 24 inches (50 to 60 cm) above the tabletop, though the particular light fixture and the height of family members also play a part. At that height, the lamp will light up the whole table without blinding people sitting below it, and the lampshade will not block their views of one another.

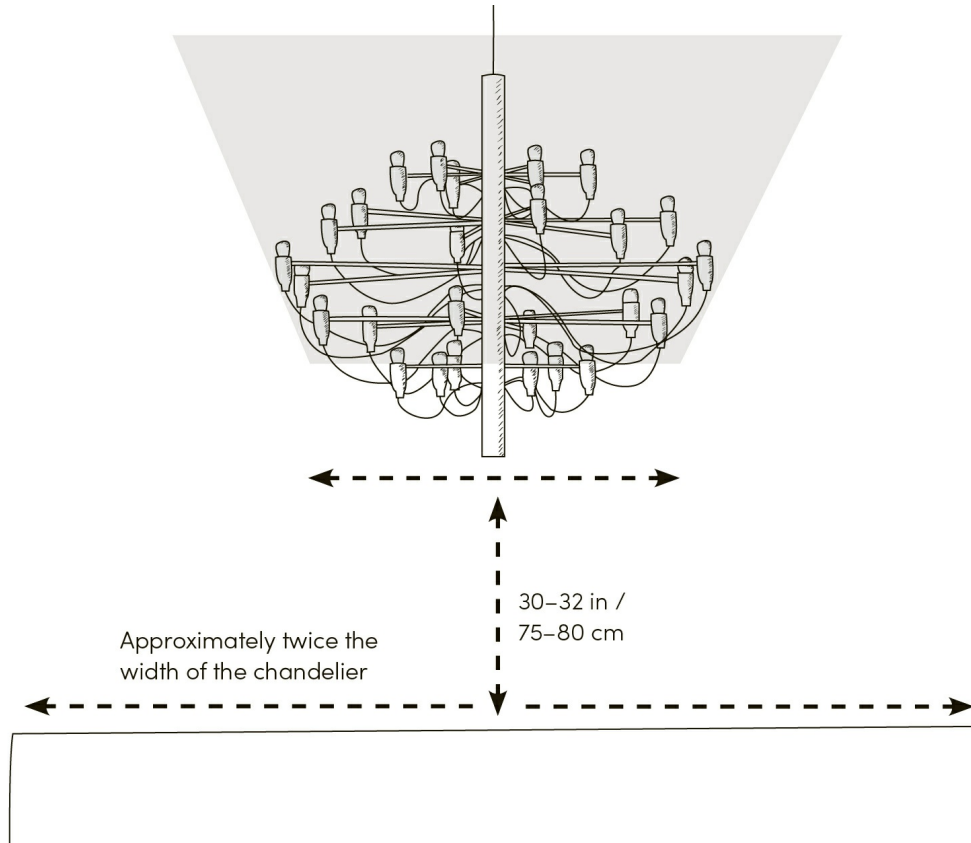
The principle is the same when planning a kitchen island or breakfast bar with seating, even though the work surface in this case will be farther from the floor than a standard tabletop. Having more than one pendant light is a good idea if the size of the lampshade prevents the beam of light from covering the whole surface. And if you do hang a number of lamps in a line, the usual rule of thumb is to leave one and a half times the width of the lampshade between each of them.

Recommended Vertical Heights

- Chandelier over a table: 30 to 32 inches (75 to 80 cm) above the table
- Chandelier that will be walked under: at least 6½ feet (78 inches / 200 cm) above the floor
- Chandelier in the hall: at least 6½ feet (78 inches / 200 cm) above the floor or 12 to 16 inches (30 to 40 cm) above the door frame to allow the door to open fully

It's fairly common to have a chandelier to provide atmospheric lighting over a dining room table that is used only on festive occasions and, therefore, does not require the same level of functional lighting as a kitchen table. Since the bulbs point upward, a chandelier does not provide the concentrated downward beam necessary for work: the indirect light shining down onto the table is often weak and, depending on the design of the chandelier, it may create shadows.

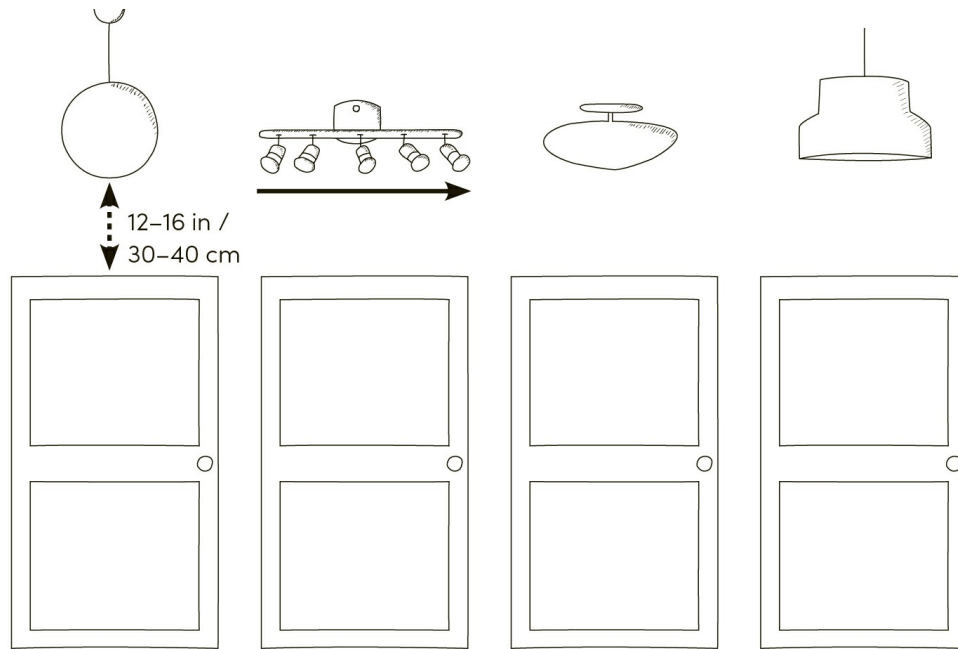
A chandelier over a dining table should be hung slightly higher than ordinary dining table lamps so as not to block the diners' view: 30 to 32 inches (75 to 80 cm) above the surface of the table is a good height. You will need to experiment to find the optimal height, as it depends on the height of the ceiling: the chandelier over a table should not be hung so high that it feels like a ceiling chandelier nor so low that it interferes with the view of those sitting at the table. It is also important for the table to be larger, in both length and width, than the diameter of the chandelier; otherwise the visual balance of the design will be disturbed.



In some rooms (living rooms and TV rooms, for instance), it is particularly important to choose shades that prevent glare and to consider the direction of the beams of light and the height and positioning of wall lights and table lamps. The height of the seating and the angle of the backs of sofas and chairs may determine the best position for a light source to prevent it from blinding people sitting on a low sofa or armchair.

Lighting the Hall

There are also guidelines to deal with the lighting in the hall. Before you begin choosing lamps, you should always start by considering the shape of the space and the height of the ceiling.



- If there is a high ceiling, there will be no problem with a pendant lamp. But always allow a safe distance for the door to open fully, and do not hang the lamp lower than 12 to 16 inches (30 to 40 cm) above the door frame.
- In a long narrow hall, more than one source of ceiling light is often preferable. You may decide on several ceiling lamps or invest in a track of spotlights on the long wall, in which case, by directing the beams at the opposite wall in order to spread light, the space will feel less narrow and the lights less glaring.
- As normal ceiling height is 8 to 9 feet (240 to 274 cm), it's often better to choose a flush ceiling light. This will avoid the risk of a door hitting a hanging lampshade.
- If you do decide on a pendant lamp in the hall, make sure it isn't open at the bottom end, as that can lead to glare. Choose a model that filters the downward light.

Different Heights for Lights

As well as thinking about the number of light sources, diffused and indirect lighting, the height of functional lighting, and avoiding glare, you will also need to arrange the height of the lights so that not all of the room's light sources are in the same horizontal plane. It is not unusual to see every lamp in a room, with the exception of the light on the ceiling, set at the same height, but it's important to create variety by adjusting some of them higher or lower or, perhaps, by buying an adjustable spotlight or a light designed to shine either upward or downward. The aim is to make lighting work collectively, so to speak, in order to create a situation that is adaptable as well as functional, irrespective of the time of day or the activity going on in the room. Spot illumination in dark corners can also make a room feel bigger than it really is.

If you are dissatisfied with your home and feel it lacks a welcoming touch, you should think about the lighting before you start buying new furniture. The problem may be that you have the wrong lighting and the wrong lamps rather than the wrong furniture. Think of the old Swedish saying *Fisk, fågel och något däremellan* ("Fish, fowl, and something in between") and go through the lighting in the room, asking yourself at which of those levels the lighting needs improvement. So, for instance, do you have only table lamps and a light on the ceiling?

Here are some examples of lamps that can be placed at different levels:

Fowl

Ceiling lights
 Flush lights
 Track lighting
 Recessed lighting
 Pendant lamps

Something in Between

Floor and reading lamps
 Table lamps on taller bureaus and sideboards
 Clamp spotlights on the bookcase

Picture lights

Spotlights with the light directed at walls or works of art

Pendant window lamps

Fish

Low lamps standing on the windowsill

Candles and votives on the side tables

Low floor lamps

Spotlights inset in the floor

LED strings on the baseboards or in window recesses

Natural Light

The purpose of turning on lights indoors is not just for better visibility but also to even out and compensate for differences in natural light throughout the day. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west, and the color of daylight changes throughout the course of the day. Depending on the direction of the windows relative to the points of the compass, daylight will move around your house in different ways, and as it does, the colors of your interior will shift.



If you intend to use indirect lighting in a room, be cautious about the gloss scale (see [this page](#)) of the paint you put on the ceiling and walls: you want to minimize the risk of any sheen, as this can be a distracting effect when not done intentionally.

When the sun rises in the morning, the natural light is colder and more intense. During the day it becomes clearer and whiter, but then, as evening approaches, it becomes warmer until the sun goes down and darkness falls. By having different color temperatures in your sources of light, as well as a variety of lamps that can be switched on, off, and dimmed throughout the day, it becomes possible to adjust and adapt your lighting according to the rhythm of the daylight. Color temperature is measured in kelvins. Photograph your room and the lamps in it, take it to a lighting store, and ask for their help as to what additional light sources your room needs to enjoy good lighting throughout the day. There are more and more technical aids available these days that will enable you to adjust your lighting by remote control. If you're curious to learn more about this whole topic, search the Internet for "human centric lighting."



Not to have a dimmer switch on your lighting is like having a loudspeaker with only one setting."

—Åsa Fjellstad

Checklist for Analyzing Color and Light in a Room

What follows is a short explanation of visual concepts you can use to analyze the perception of light in a room.

- *Light level:* How light is the room?
- *Light distribution:* What is the distribution of light during the day, during the evening? What is the positioning of the lamps?
- *Shadows:* Is the level of shadow formation just right, that is, does it prevent the light from feeling flat? Shadows can emphasize shapes and structures, but if the shadows are too harsh and sharp, they can cause disruptive contrasts.
- *Patches of light:* Are there small areas that differ from the overall light level in the room? Light patches can be caused by electric lights (a perforated lampshade, for instance) or by natural light (such as the outline of a window thrown onto a wall).
- *Reflections and gleam:* Reflections of light can produce a pretty shimmer and lift dull material, but are there unwanted reflections that are unpleasant and irritating?
- *Glare:* Is the light in the room free of glare, or does it bother you?
- *Color of the light:* What color is the light in the room? That will depend on whether the light sources are cold or hot, the color of the light they emit, and the color of the surfaces that reflect the light.
- *Color of surfaces:* The color we perceive on the walls and on the furniture can be affected by the light that hits them. Surfaces with weak colors (a gray sofa, for instance) are more affected by the color of the light. We perceive a strong color as being less affected because it has a more distinct color identity of its own.

Lighting Glossary

Watt (W): A measure of power.

Lumen (lm): A measure of how much light a source emits. The more lumens, the stronger the light; the fewer lumens, the weaker the light.

Kelvin (K): A measure of the color temperature of light.

Ra value: A measure of a light's color reproduction. Ra values lie between 0 and 100. A high Ra value means good color reproduction; a low Ra value means poor color

Lighting Tricks

- Standing a table lamp on the TV console adds some coziness to the room, and setting a midlevel lamp close to the TV also helps to dull the sharp contrast between a very bright TV and a dark room.
- If you want to illuminate artwork, bear in mind that glass may cause reflections and spoil your appreciation of the image. Try to arrange unobtrusive lighting from the side instead of the front, and mount the light fixture at least 39 inches (1 m) from the image. For the same reason, avoid hanging glass-covered pictures immediately opposite glittering chandeliers or sunny windows.

Why Sources of Light Look Different

Studying all the new sources of light in the store where we used to buy our old lightbulbs, I can see it is easy to be confused. There is a huge range of different strengths and shapes to choose from, not to mention differences in the transparency of the glass in the bulbs. What should you choose and where should you use it?

- Clear glass bulbs are best in lamps with transparent shades (clear glass to clear glass). And don't forget dimmers and brightness, since glass shades cannot filter the light.
- Frosted lightbulbs work best in most lamps since the pearlescent glass spreads light more evenly.
- Mirror-topped (or half-chrome) lightbulbs throw the light onto the reflector of the light fixture and work well, for instance, with open light fixtures such as classic shoemaker shades, since the top prevents the bulb from creating glare.



Design Tips

What I've done in this chapter is bring together a collection of tried-and-true design tips. They make no claim to exact science nor to providing you with a set of rules and regulations. Think of them, instead, as a variety of strategies and approaches, methods and tips, if you like—things you can try out when you get stuck.

A Recipe for the Finishing Touch

It might seem strange to start a chapter on design with suggestions on how to put the finishing touch to a project, but it's one of the most common questions people ask designers like myself. Many people have their basic furnishings in place but lack those last details that make a room feel interesting and cozy. Now, how to dot the i's, cross the t's, and bring it all to completion?

I often use Brooklyn-based designer/stylist Kelley Carter's clever checklist of the vital ingredients involved in making a room feel complete. With her permission, I'll share it with you. Kelley describes how to go about making an interior more interesting and inviting, and if you keep her main points in mind, the tips that come later in the chapter will be easier to follow. Could it be that all you need to add is a still life or a wall of pictures to act as "the inviter" or the "wow" object? Read this first:

- *The inviter* is something that sparks your interest and curiosity and draws you into the room. It may be an interesting detail that catches your eye and lures you to step in and look at it more closely, or just to feel the mood of the room.
- *The cozyfier* is something that entices you to stay in the room. It may be a lovely cashmere throw or a beautiful armchair that calls you to curl up in it.
- *The eye lifter* is a detail that leads your eyes upward and creates a frame for the other furniture in the room. It may be a lamp that makes you raise your eyes and see the whole room, a striking wall of pictures from floor to ceiling, or a large houseplant that forces you to notice both it and the whole room.
- *The "wow" object* is the detail with the loudest voice and, consequently, the obvious focal point. It may be something architectural, such as a couple of big windows with a fantastic view, or an utterly stunning design accessory or piece of furniture.
- *The weird thing* is what brings the observer to a sudden halt and then holds the eye. "Where on earth did you get hold of that thing?" It might be a work of art, an heirloom, a collection of things you bought at a flea market, or—why not?—something you made yourself.
- *The personalizers* are those items that make your house or apartment yours and no one else's. They may be family photos, inherited pieces, souvenirs, or personal objects that tell your story and that of the people who live under your roof. These things don't have to be prominent or eye-catching—just things that are nice to have.
- *The natural element* consists of those things that add a feeling of life, texture, and, in some cases, color to a space: plants, cut flowers, natural materials, and objects with an organic shape.
- *The finishing details* are the things that fill in the blank spaces in a complete interior and add life to the furnishings: a basket of magazines by the sofa perhaps, some books stacked on the sideboard, or a beautiful bowl on a side table.
- *Signs of life* are the last details necessary to bring a room to life—items that remind you it is lived in: favorite slippers, reading glasses, a cup of morning coffee beside an armchair. These are the kinds of things that get cleared away before a photo is taken for Instagram or when there is an interview with a magazine, but otherwise they are there every day, creating a homey atmosphere and the wonderful sense that people have made themselves at home here.

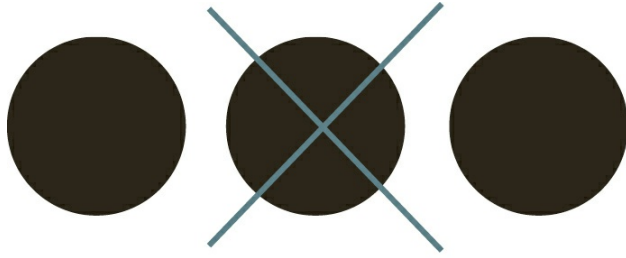
Still Life Styling

Designers frequently group objects in order to catch the eye or reinforce the style and mood they are trying to achieve in an interior. These arrangements are called still lifes. Grouping things rather than spreading them out is an effective way to make a design that is rich in detail feel more cohesive. How do we go about it?

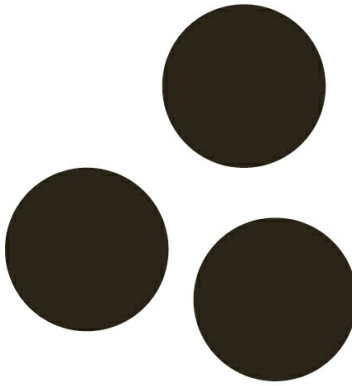
I have studied numerous still lifes in detail and tried to identify common foundations and important elements. Depending on how many or how few objects you are intending to group, it may well be that one object has to fill several roles at the same time. But here are a few of the necessary ingredients to think about before you start.

Vital Ingredients

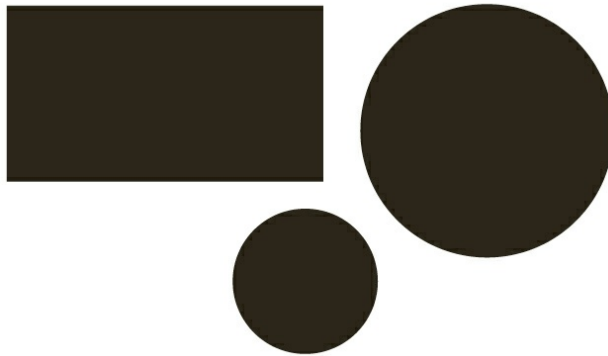
- A high point (a big plant or cut flowers)
- A weighty point (such as a rounded vase, a bowl, or some other visually heavy object)
- A focus point (the detail that is the main character in the still life)
- Something organic or irregular (something taken from nature or made of natural materials, such as a ceramic piece or artwork)
- Horizontal lines (such as books lying flat, boxes, or oval dishes)
- Vertical lines (such as tall, slim objects or candlesticks)
- Complementary objects (small personal details that balance other objects: a pretty stone, perhaps, a shell, or something the children made)



Don't line things up in the still life.



Gather things and group them together.



Try to work with different sizes and shapes.



Think about overlapping. Create an “in front of” and a “behind.”

Grouping Step by Step

1. Collect the objects you want to use. Choose a mixture of materials and structures, such as wood, metal, and glass in different shapes (round, straight, square, organic). Remember to have a variety of sizes. Use opposites to create contrast—high and low, soft and hard, matte and glossy, smooth and rough.
2. Sort the objects according to size. This will make the following steps easier.
3. Mark the place where the still life is to stand. Measure it with your eye or use markers so that you know the confines of your area. A good trick for beginners is to put a tray under it; then you will have a clear-cut space to work within.
4. Decide on the outer contour or outline your grouping is to have. Think triangles. Are the objects going to form a standing triangle or a lying triangle? In which direction do you want the lines to lead the eye?
5. Start at the back and work your way forward as you place the objects.
6. Work with odd numbers (e.g., three, five, seven). This seems to create a better dynamic since it stops the eye from sorting items into pairs.
7. Make sure you create overlaps in the group so that the objects conceal a little of one another. This produces a better sense of unity.
8. Try to place the objects in such a way that the eye is led through the still life. Remember the golden spiral and try to encourage the eye to follow that kind of movement.

Good Places for Still Lives

If you have never before created a still life in your home, you may feel you don't know where to start. I'll suggest a couple of good places for your still life as well as some good reasons for bringing things together in different places. What can still lifes contribute to your home?

First Impressions: Outside the House

If you live in a house, a still life can be the first thing you and your guests encounter before you even step inside the door. A group of outdoor potted plants of different heights by the front door can be changed according to the season and will act as a friendly note.

Something Welcoming in the Hall

If you have space to create a focal point alongside the necessary storage arrangements in and around the hall, a still life can be a fine addition. It could be up on the hall shelf on the wall. It could also be positioned a little farther away, along a sight line from the hall into a room; this can be a good solution if the hall itself is too narrow.

Something Personal in the Living Room

Bring together items that mean something to you and make you feel good and use them to create a still life in the living room. Use a space on the bookcase, a side table, or the TV stand, depending on what suits you best. The chosen objects can be things that remind you of a hobby or interest, or items like a pretty seashell you found on holiday. Don't buy new objects—use things inherited from your parents' place or strange junk shop finds that trigger positive associations and memories.

Something Cozy and Comforting in the Bathroom and Guest Room

A still life can contribute to a cozy, caring feeling for both you and your guests. A little flower or a small green branch in a vase together with a group of pretty perfume bottles and a bar of fine soap on a shelf can make an enormous difference to the feel of a harsh cold bathroom. The guest room, too, can be improved with a still life that shows forethought for your visitors; group a small vase with a flower, some magazines, and a scented candle on the bedside table or chest of drawers.

Organizing Things in the Kitchen, Study, and Child's Room

In all those parts of the home where many things have to be in sight at the same time, the still life technique really comes into its own. I'm thinking particularly of the kitchen, the study, and the child's room. Some conscious grouping of objects can create structure. Still lifes of this kind have a practical everyday function as well as being visually pleasing. So, for example, gather together the oils, spices, and cutting boards into a group on the kitchen work surface; the pens, brushes, tools, and desk supplies into a still life in the study; or the toys, stuffed animals, and books in the spaces occupied by the smallest members of the family.

Designers' Secrets

Still not right? Here are a couple of tricks that can make all the difference and raise your arrangements from the amateur to the professional level.

Changes of Level

Use different levels to create leading lines and sloping outer contours.

Overlapping

Not in a straight line! Remember to overlap things.

Depth

Work in three dimensions and give your still life depth by creating an “in front of” and a “behind”—and an “in the middle” if you have space.

Layers

A still life is often more exciting and dynamic if there are several layers to explore.

Movement

Lead the gaze through the grouping and try to create a golden spiral.

Triangles (Isosceles or Recumbent)

Avoid building boxes and try instead to create a triangular outer shape. One good way of structuring your group is to work with both a primary triangle (the first that is seen) and a secondary triangle (a smaller one that shows up only after you have studied it for a while).

Show Off Your Collection

Are you a collector? Turn it into a still life. Groups of objects don't all have to be different things. You can make a wonderful still life of nothing but ceramic vases, colored glass, or different sizes of Dala horses—or, indeed, anything you have collected can be given an eye-catching place in your home.

Hanging Pictures

No home is complete without decorated walls. There are too many people, however, who live with empty walls for far too long just because they are afraid to put a nail hole in the wall or hang a picture in the wrong place.

The best advice is to say that an empty wall is usually worse than a picture in the wrong place, and a crooked picture is easy enough to deal with, whereas the vacuum caused by empty walls is a lot more difficult to rectify.

What Are You Aiming For?

Do you want the pictures to sing loudly or to act as a chorus in the background? Give some thought to the kind of stimulus and effect you are trying to achieve: is it an exclamation mark or something more discreet?



Frame, Mat, and Glass

“If clothes make the man, the frame makes the picture,” someone once said. It’s worth reminding ourselves that the choice of frame is primarily to lift the work of art, not the interior design, but in spite of that, many people seem to think that the frame should match the furniture rather than the picture. The kind of wood you choose, the color, the metal, the thickness or thinness of the frame—all these things can make a huge difference to the picture, irrespective of whether it is a simple print or an expensive lithograph. Acid-free paper is essential (the work of art will last a good deal longer) and the glass is important. Good ultraviolet (UV) protection glass will have the same effect on the durability of the artwork as does the choice of mat board. High-quality nonreflective glass will also improve the clarity of the image and enhance your experience of it much more than a cheaper solution.

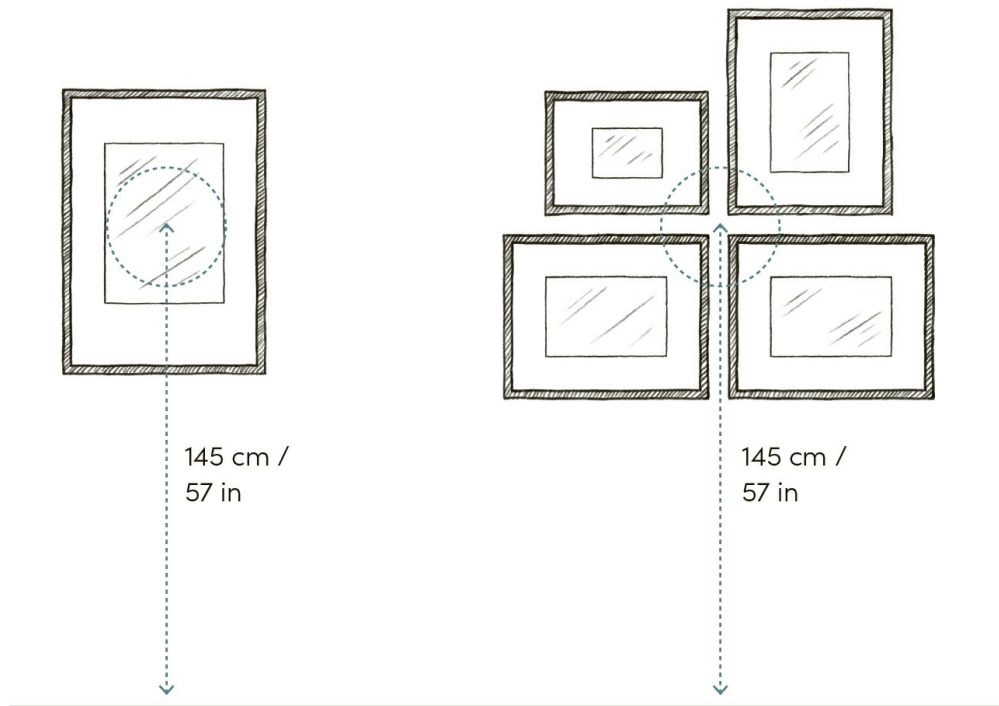
And did you know that mats are cut at an angle in order to help throw light on the image? Their other purpose, of course, is to prevent the image from pressing against the glass.

General Points

- If you hang pictures behind a sofa or bed, they should not be as wide as the piece of furniture. It works best if the picture covers only two-thirds of the wall behind the furniture.
- The most common mistake is to hang pictures too high or too low. The optimal height depends on the height of your ceiling and the furniture that will be close to the pictures. A useful guideline is to work on the 145 principle (referring to 145 cm, or 57 inches; more on this follows), or to position the midline of the picture two-thirds of the way up from floor to ceiling.
- Light-color frames allow the picture itself to really sing out, as they don’t draw attention away from the subject of the picture.
- Dark-color frames create contrast and help to balance images that have dark parts, such as black-and-white photos.

The 145 Principle

How high should you hang your pictures? American interior designers often say that “57 inches to the center” is the rule of thumb for hanging pictures. That means the center of the picture or of the wall of pictures should be at a height of 57 inches (145 cm) from the floor, which is the most pleasing height for an observer to view pictures. If you follow that rule too rigidly, however, it can lead to the proportions seeming out of kilter if, for instance, the room has a particularly high ceiling or if there is a sofa with a very low back in front of the wall. But it is still a useful measurement to have in mind when working out the best height for hanging your pictures.

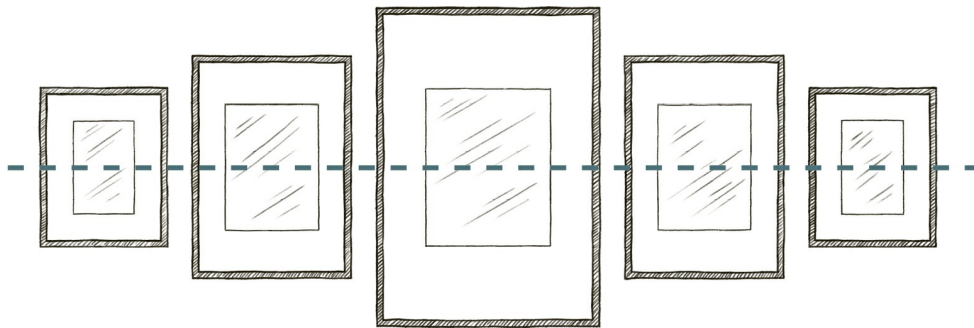


Planning Walls of Pictures

You can use a number of approaches when creating a wall of pictures. All frames can be the same size, or you can have a variety of different sizes. If you decide on the latter, it's usually best to work with three different sizes of frame—large, small, and one in between. This gives the wall a more cohesive feeling, as well as providing a bridge between the largest and the smallest shapes. And it's worth remembering that frames can be turned so that they are either vertical or horizontal. (And frames of the same size work well if some are standing and some lying.)

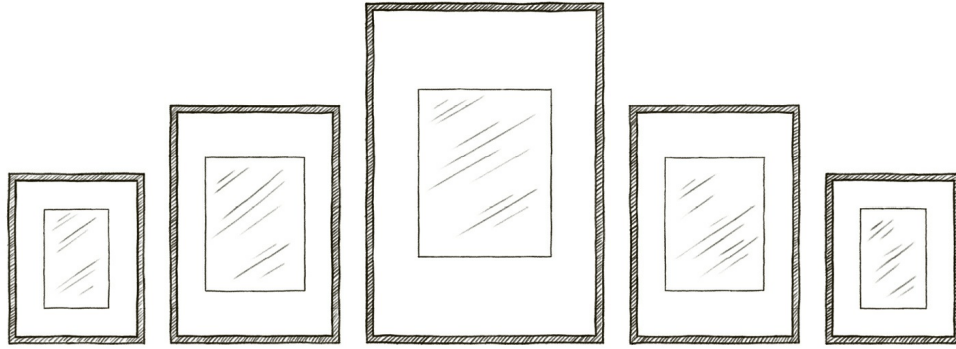
Midline

Hang your pictures in a row so that the midlines of all pictures line up.



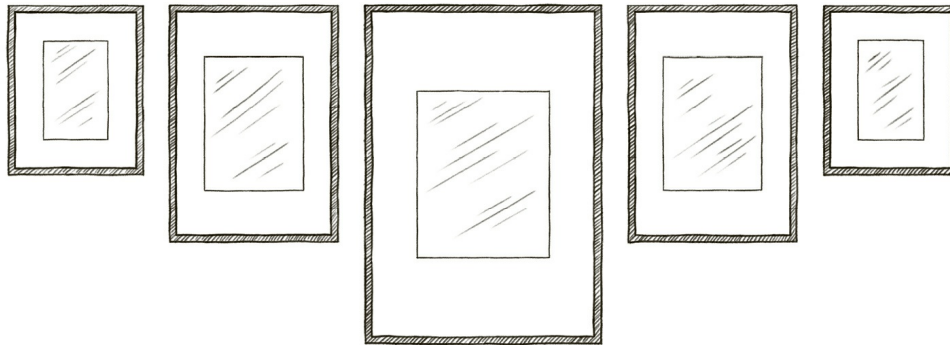
Base Line

Hang your pictures in a row so that the base lines of all pictures line up. This works with both regular and irregular frame shapes.



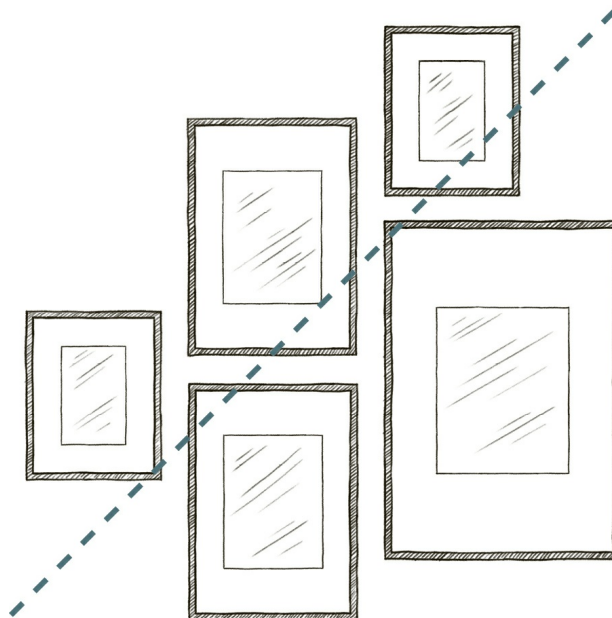
Top Line

Hang your pictures in a row so that the top lines of all pictures line up.



Leading Line

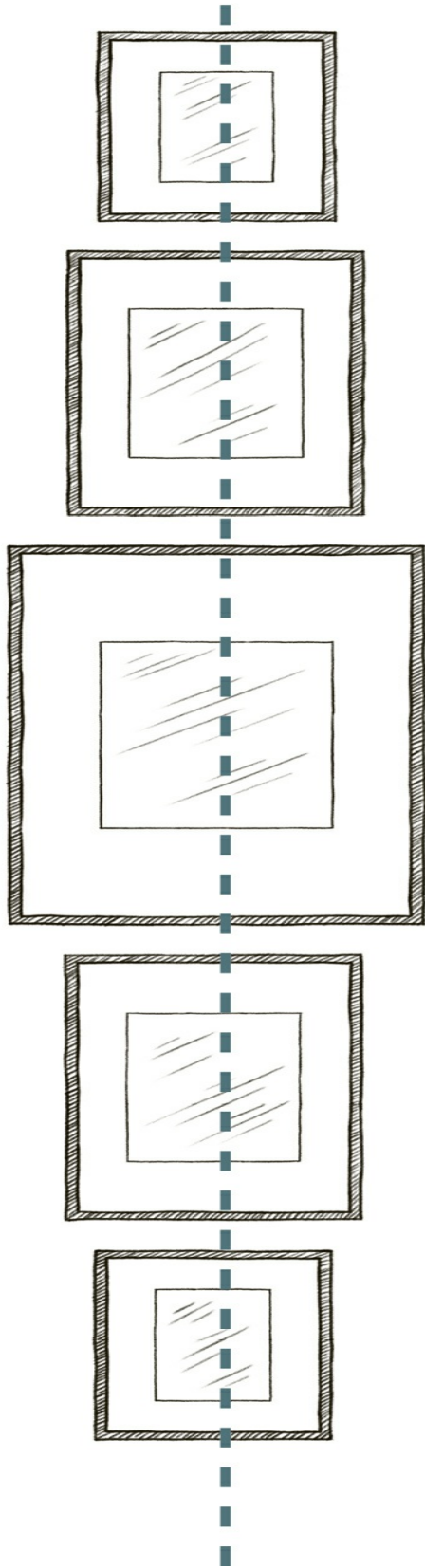
Choose the subjects and hang the pictures so that the eye is led diagonally upward. Mix vertical frames with horizontal frames and ensure that the frames of all pictures are an equal distance apart; 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cm) is about the right distance.



Plumb Line

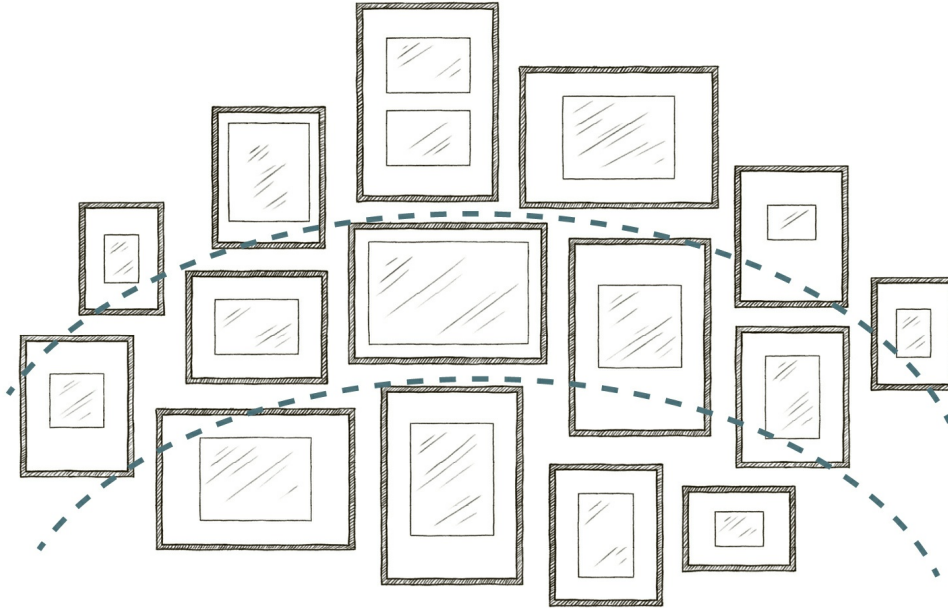
Hang your pictures directly above one another on a central plumb line whether the frames are all the same size or different sizes. This works well with both regular

and irregular frame shapes and is particularly good for narrow sections of wall—between doors, for instance.



Wave-Shaped Outline

One way of making a wall of pictures when you have many different frame sizes and don't want to create an angular pattern is to hang the pictures in an imagined wave shape. Choose one picture to act as the hub and then hang the other pictures in curved lines running from it. This creates a pattern that the eye perceives as a unit even though the outer edges are uneven.



Box-Shaped Outline

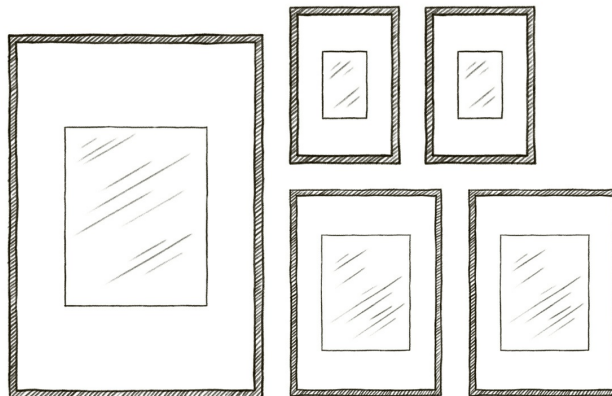
Even when working with frames of different sizes, you can create a sense of coherence and calm by arranging the outer edges of the wall of pictures to form a square or rectangular box. The eye is tricked into seeing this as a cohesive unit even though the individual parts vary.

Choose a Main Character

It can be difficult to know how to start your wall of pictures. My best advice is to pick out a favorite. Place the favorite first and then choose its companions: you want the other pictures to help highlight the picture you like best.

Fluid Outline

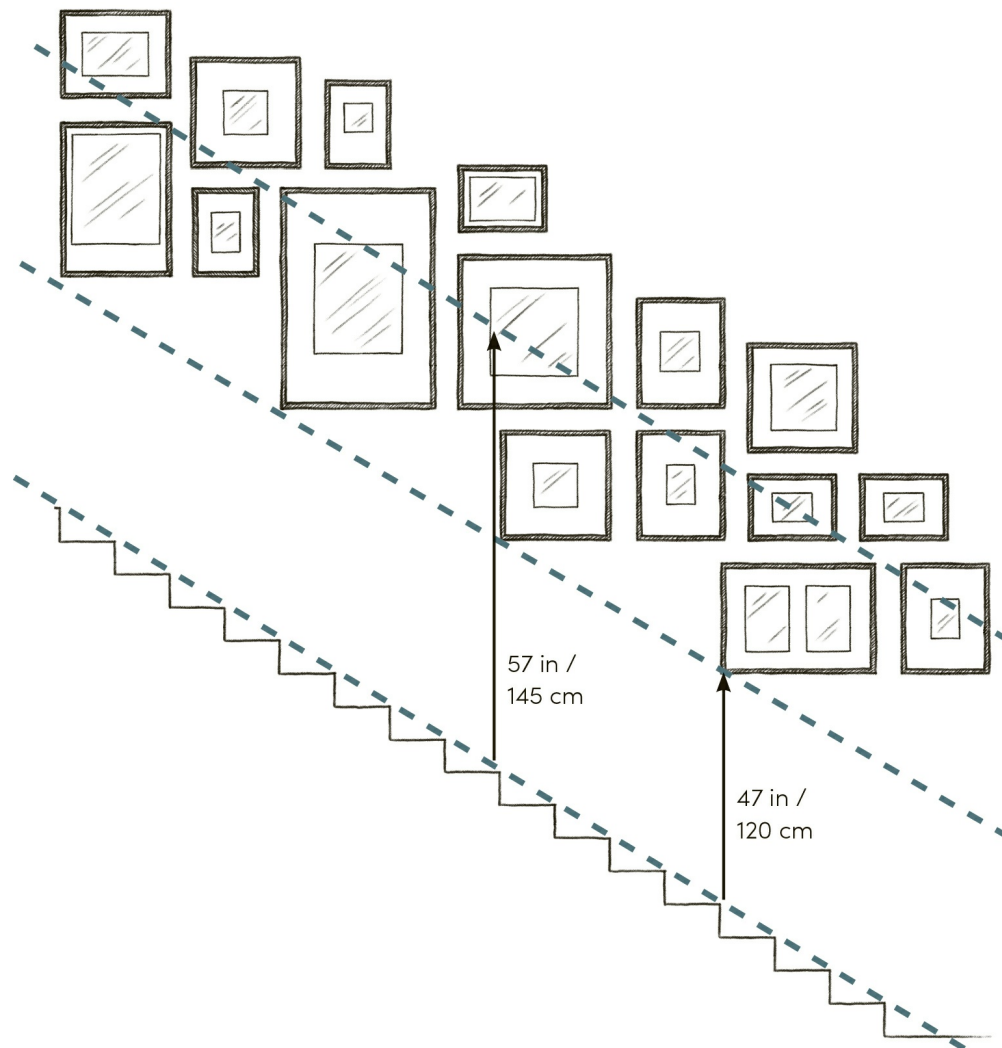
By using various groups of pictures and frames of different sizes, you can build up fluid outlines on your picture wall. If a particular image is too big or too small (but not too valuable!), you can cut the print or printout, or add a larger or smaller mat, then place the image on the wall in a different frame than the one you initially intended.



Hanging Pictures down a Staircase

A wall of pictures down the staircase is a good way to accentuate space and height. The trick here is to hang many similar pictures in a repeating pattern, but also to

ensure that the frames mirror the rising steps of the staircase. Measure the distance from the step to the bottom edge of the frames and, using that number, produce a midline for the pictures that mirrors the rise of the staircase.



Cheek by Jowl

On most picture walls, the pictures are hung between 2 and 4 inches (5 and 10 cm) apart. But hanging them close together, cheek by jowl so to speak, can be very effective. In this way, you can compose a work that runs along the wall in a line or forms a dramatic shape.

Hanging Pictures in Corners

There are certain areas that we almost automatically fill with pictures (the wall behind the sofa or the bed, for instance). There are other areas we seem to forget about (for example, corners). By using pictures to delineate a corner—a reading corner, perhaps—you can create the feeling that there is an extra room beyond.

Practical Tips for Picture Walls

- Place larger and visually heavier images, frames, and pictures on the left side of your picture wall. Most people read from left to right and, consequently, look at a picture wall in the same way.
- Large pictures are best hung on the lower part of the picture wall.
- If you hang a picture behind the sofa, make sure that the frame is 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 cm) above the top of the sofa back; otherwise there is a risk that someone will accidentally bang the picture when he or she sits down, or the protruding frame will disturb the comfort of those sitting on the sofa.
- If you are hanging pictures where you eat, it's a good idea to lower their midlines a little so that you can enjoy them even when you are sitting.

Before You Hammer a Nail In!

To avoid walls that end up looking like Swiss cheese, it's a good idea to have a dry run and test the arrangement before setting to work. Here are a few hints that don't

require nail holes until you have decided on the layout.

The Floor Trick

Before you start putting nails in the wall, it's worth experimenting with the images and frames on the floor in front of the wall you intend to use. Lay out all the frames and artwork you are thinking of combining, and move them around until you have found the best arrangement. This allows you to test different spacing and order without making holes in the wall.

The Tape Trick

When you buy a new frame, there is often a sheet inside it on which the manufacturer has listed the measurements of the frame and other bits of information. Don't throw it away! You can test different positions for your pictures by taping the sheets on the wall—another way of avoiding nail holes. If you are using older frames, you can, of course, make your own sheets out of kraft paper or gift wrap. Draw around the edge of the frame and cut out the paper. Do be careful which adhesive tape you use, especially if you are working on wallpapered walls. Using painter's tape can be helpful.

Cut-and-Paste Trick

If you haven't yet moved into your house, or if you want to do a small-scale version of the previously mentioned tests, get a ruler and some graph paper and cut out scaled-down versions of the different frames you intend to put on the wall.

Following a Recipe or Improvising

It's always best to buy and bring home all the ingredients before you start cooking (or, in this case, hammering nails in the wall). But it is not always that easy to do in the real world. Not when it comes to interiors, anyway, where many of the decisions involved are a result of desire, emotion, and how you feel on a particular day. You don't always find the right way immediately, and sometimes you have to save up to buy the particular item you are longing for. And you don't want to live with empty walls while you wait. My feeling is that you should start by putting up what you already have and let the rest grow from there. The odd nail hole can always be filled, and any picture is better than no picture. Even if you think you have all the images and motifs you need, using the floor approach may well lead you to add something or remove something, but my best advice is just to get started and use what you already possess.

The best way to extract old plastic wall anchors is to use a corkscrew!

Is It Okay to Mix Frames?

Is it all right to combine different types of frames, varieties of wood, and other materials on the picture wall? Of course it is! It is, in fact, a way of bringing the wall to life, especially if the images are monochrome—black-and-white photographs, for instance. Mixing frames will give you an eclectic result, but if you want a more restful feel, stick to one color or to metal frames (either warm or cold tones), even if the frames are of different sizes and shapes.

Affording Photographic Art

Photographic art is popular but expensive, but you might still want to cover your wall with great pictures at a price you can afford. Go to the nearest newspaper shop and buy an armful of glossy fashion and lifestyle magazines—the bigger they are, the better. Think about the quality of the paper: strong, thick paper will last longer than thin pages that tend to go bubbly after a while. Look for good fashion reportage without text, or pieces you can cut out. Take out whole pages using sharp scissors or a craft knife, or clip out smaller photos that you can turn into larger pictures by using mats. You can either buy mat boards cut to standard sizes, or you can have them trimmed to your own measurements. (The latter is likely to push up the price.) If you are sure-handed, you can buy stiff card stock and use a ruler and craft knife to cut out your own mats.



When hanging larger artworks, remember that bigger images usually need to be a little farther from the eye to be seen properly, so, as well as considering size in proportion to the wall and nearby furniture, give some thought to the viewing distance. Is the room furnished in such a way that it will be possible to enjoy the picture at a distance, or is there a risk that the picture can be viewed only at close quarters?

What About the Windows?

What we put in our windows can be seen from outside as well as inside, so there are two reasons why we should be very careful about what we do there. I know from experience, however, that windows make many of us sigh in frustration. One reason why it's difficult to give general advice is that different window models pose very different challenges. Take another look at the timeline survey of Swedish houses (beginning on [this page](#)) and you will recognize how much windows have varied in structure and appearance. A window from 1900 with muntins has lines, proportions, and natural focal points that are quite different from a modern panorama window. Here are some things to think about if you're feeling stuck.

Muntins and Sashes

Start by defining the fundamentals of your window. What kind of frame are you dealing with? The size of the panes, the color of the frame, the number of muntins, the external measurements, the shape and style? How many lines and angles will call attention to themselves, or is the challenge going to be that you have just one large pane to work with as you try to come up with some sort of pleasing composition? This kind of thing can and will affect the dimensions you choose for everything from curtains to flowerpots and lamps.

Windowsills

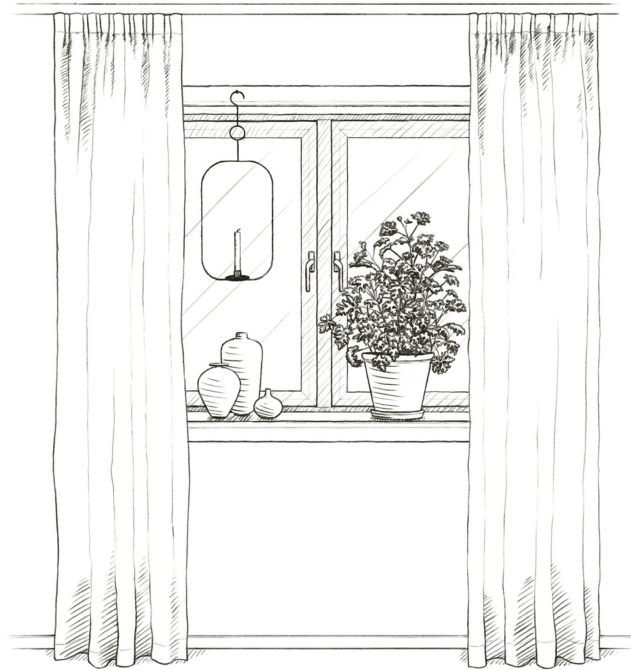
Older houses often were built with good-size windowsills, which had the advantage that they had space to hold sizable objects, and the disadvantage that things just disappeared in comparison with the space. Don't be afraid of the size of pots and the bases of lamps. Think fewer but bigger. You are more likely to create harmony if you go for a few large objects rather than many small knickknacks.

Modern houses often have narrow window niches and sills. This makes it a real challenge when trying to compose arrangements with plants or lamps since, although they have plenty of space upward, there is very little room available in terms of width and depth. The trick here is not just to work from the bottom of the window up but also from the top down, with both plants and other visual items in order to create variation and differences in height.

Handles

Fastenings and handles tend to be pretty, decorative features on older windows, but modern practical aluminum handles are not something we like to draw attention to. Depending on what you want to highlight or to hide, you can create lines that will lead the eye to focus on the points you want it to.

You can lead the eye away from ugly handles by having a flourishing curtain of plants growing up the side of the window. Invest in eye-catching pots, a pretty still life, or an attractive window lamp—all of these will provide a natural resting place for the observer's eye. If, however, the functional pieces of the window are attractive, aim the spotlight at them, both literally and figuratively: emphasize them by choosing similar metals and materials for the pots and decorations.



The View Out

What can you see on the other side of the window? Do you want to hide the view or draw attention to it? Given a miserable view on the other side of the pane, your best course is to simply let the daylight filter through; on the other hand, if the outlook is pretty, decorations are probably superfluous.

Compass Direction

Working out which direction the window faces is important because it will enhance your chance of success and make many of your choices (colors, whether the curtains will fade, plant types) much easier.

Proportions

The bigger the window, the bolder your brushstrokes should be. When choosing pots and plants, always consider the size of the windowpane—you don't want everything to seem small and fussy by comparison.

Placement

Standing a number of similar objects in a row is unlikely to create a sense of dynamism. If your window arrangement feels flat, it may be because there is too much repetition and symmetry and too little variation. Try grouping plant pots in clusters instead of spreading them out, and make the spaces between them irregular to prevent the eye from following a linear path. Don't forget to vary the height and shape of the items on the windowsill. And it's worth working with opposites—rounded forms meeting angular forms or soft meeting hard. Read the section on contrast and juxtaposition (see [this page](#)) and experiment until you find the best arrangement.

Changing Levels

I often feel that a window becomes more exciting if there are some changes of level, not just in the window but also outside its actual frame. Having a plant curl down

from a pot on the windowsill or climb upward like a living curtain while other plants spread their lush foliage in the middle of the sill breaks up any sense of monotony. With their curves and their varied contours, candlesticks can also be a great help when you are working to make an arrangement feel more dynamic.

Lamps and Lighting

Lighting helps create a homey and harmonious feeling and can be an important element in designing the window, which is, of course, seen from inside and from outside, especially during the winter. Always measure the depth of the windowsill to ensure there is as much room as you need before you buy a lampshade or splash out on a sculptural designer lamp—you don't want to risk it falling off. Vary the lighting from room to room, standing lighting in some places, pendant lighting in others, depending on what is most practical in each situation.

In rooms for younger children, a table lamp is likely to be risky as it will frequently end up on the floor if the children catch the cord. A pendant light is more practical in this case: if you don't have an outlet near the upper edge of the window, you can tack the cord up with plastic clips. But a pendant light is unlikely to work in windows with Roman or roller blinds, in which case a lamp designed to stand alone, whether on a base or as a sculptural object, will be neater, safer, and more functional.

Decorations

In homes dominated by angles, straight lines, and big windows, breaking up the lines with organic shapes and irregular outlines can be a relief. Candlesticks have already been mentioned, but piles of books, sculptures, and vases are also a great help in this respect.

Curtains

Curtains, like clothes and fashion in general, are subject to trends, and your choice of length, weight, and cut is likely to vary a good deal according to style and taste. Here are a few guidelines that may be useful to know, irrespective which type of curtain you prefer.

There are good, practical, as well as aesthetic, reasons why we work with fabrics around the windows. If you live in an older house with poor insulation, curtains help deal with drafts and cold spots close to the windows. They are also essential when we want to exclude the light and have a dark room, or to filter daylight when it's too bright, or to shield computer and TV screens from glare.

The color, fabric, and pattern you choose for your curtains will quickly set the tone for the room. Thick velvet curtains create a completely different atmosphere from thin, flimsy fabrics, and a curtain wall of patterned textiles can create the same sort of impact in a room as a decorated feature wall. Interior designers frequently use curtains to create optical illusions and make the window or, indeed, the whole room feel bigger or smaller, as the case may be.

Modern homes may no longer have the same need for curtains at the windows to deal with drafts and insulation, but curtains have acquired a new practical purpose. The area of glass in our homes has increased during the modern period, and big windows inevitably mean less privacy, especially in densely populated areas where the houses are close together. A curtain made of light fabric can be drawn across the window to preserve privacy without blocking out daylight. Flowing fabrics can soften the severity of new construction and create a cozier atmosphere in harsh, angular rooms. Curtains are also an effective means of damping irritating acoustics and producing a more pleasant sound environment. And they protect our floors and furniture from fading in strong sunlight.

Rail or Rod

There is an endless variety of systems and ways of hanging curtains to choose from. One important decision is whether to use a rail or a rod. It is relatively easy to put up the classic curtain rod with its wall brackets typically on either side of the window. The rod can be unobtrusive and melt into the background, or you can make it a design feature by choosing an eye-catching model with decorative knobs or finials on the ends. The advantage of a rod is that its length can be adjusted relatively quickly and simply, because many versions are joined in the middle and can be screwed in or out to obtain the desired length. And if you move, it's easy to take with you and use it in your new home. There are a number of ways of attaching the curtains to the rod: simple fabric ties, sewn-in eyelets, and curtain rings with clips are just a few.

Rails (curtain tracks), especially those fixed to the ceiling, have become very popular in recent years. They can be attached either to the wall with brackets or to the ceiling. The latter often runs right across the room from wall to wall, and you can either order the correct length or have them cut to size. The actual rail is unobtrusive, and the sliding hooks are normally invisible. Since they take up very little room, it is possible to put several rails alongside one another in order to hang different layers of curtains—an inner curtain of flimsy material for the sake of privacy, perhaps, and a heavier curtain to cut out the light.



Be sure not to let the curtains conceal attractive cornices. Hang the curtains on a rod or fix the curtain rails to the wall immediately below the cornice.

Length and Height of Curtain Rods

To decide on the length of rod you need and how high to attach it, you need to measure the width of your window from one outer edge of the frame to the other and then add at least 4 inches (10 cm) to each side. Next measure at least 4 inches (10 cm) up from those two points in order to mark where the brackets should be mounted. These are recommended minimum measurements. If you are afraid the curtains will block out daylight, or if you want the window to seem bigger than it actually is, you can add 4 inches (10 cm) or so to the width and to the height, but remember to take account of the adjoining walls and furnishings—you don't want the curtain rod colliding with anything at either side. The usual measurement allows the curtain rod to protrude 12 to 16 inches (30 to 40 cm) beyond the window frame. Don't forget that you might need extra brackets if the rod is long and the curtains heavy.

When putting up a curtain rail you can follow the same approach in terms of outer measurements. If the rail is to run from wall to wall across the room, however, you will need to measure the width of the room before buying the rail. With a ceiling rail, it is important not to attach the rail too close to the window wall, because

you must allow sufficient space for the curtain to open easily and, as it is being opened, for the folds in the curtain not to come into contact with the wall. When you are putting up the rails, whichever kind you are using, it is sensible to add an extra screw or bracket at points where the weight of the curtains will be most concentrated.

How Much Curtain Material Will You Need?

The most common mistake made when estimating the amount of material for a curtain is to work from the width of the window. What you should measure is the full length of the curtain rod or rail and multiply it by one and a half or two, depending on the depth of pleats you want in your curtain. I normally reckon on 2¼ yards (2 m) of material for every yard of rail. When your curtains are made of patterned material, it is important to remember the amount of pattern repeat when you choose fabric. The width of the pattern repeat is usually given in inches if you buy your material from well-stocked suppliers.

How Long Should Curtains Be?

The length and width of curtains is a matter of taste and will vary depending on the style and appearance you are aiming for, but here are some of the most common current measurements:

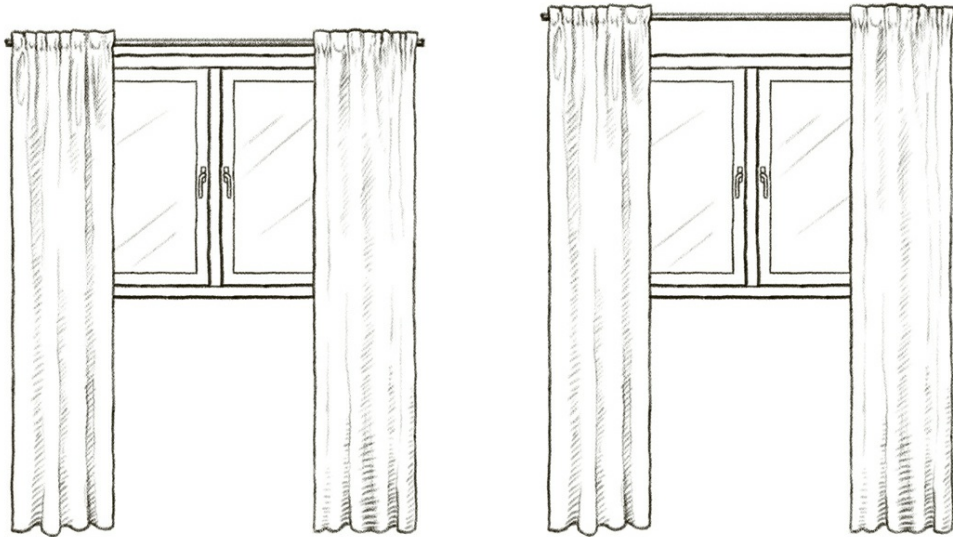
Medium-Length Curtains

These usually reach from ¾ to 1¼ inches (2 to 3 cm) below the window frame or windowsill.

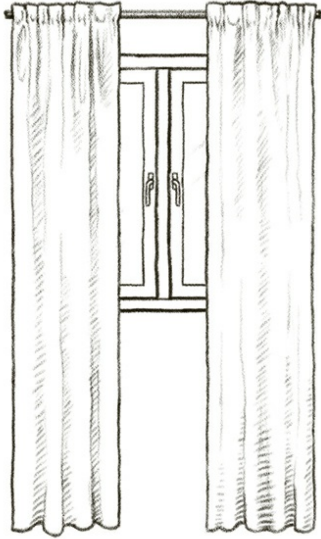
Full-Length Curtains

There are different schools of thought here, but the most common advice is to ensure that the curtains aren't too short. Advice I've been given by many professional curtain makers is that the curtain should stop ¾ to 1¼ inches (2 to 3 cm) from the floor. If you are trying to achieve the look that the curtain is hovering just above the floor, you can go for about ½ inch (1 cm), which is very close to the floor but still not trailing. Another alternative is to have the curtain so long that it falls onto the floor like a puddle; in this case you need to be very careful to make sure it looks like a conscious choice. On the whole, anything in between these options runs the risk of appearing messy.

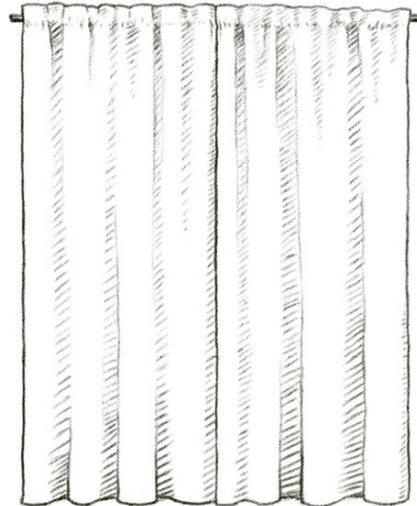
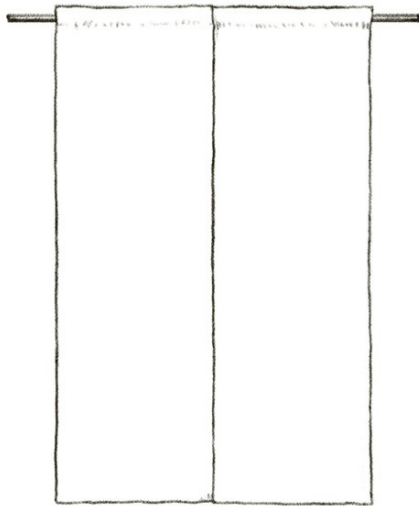
Using iron-on hemming tape doesn't require a sewing machine when you want to shorten your curtains to the desired length. All you will need is scissors and an iron!



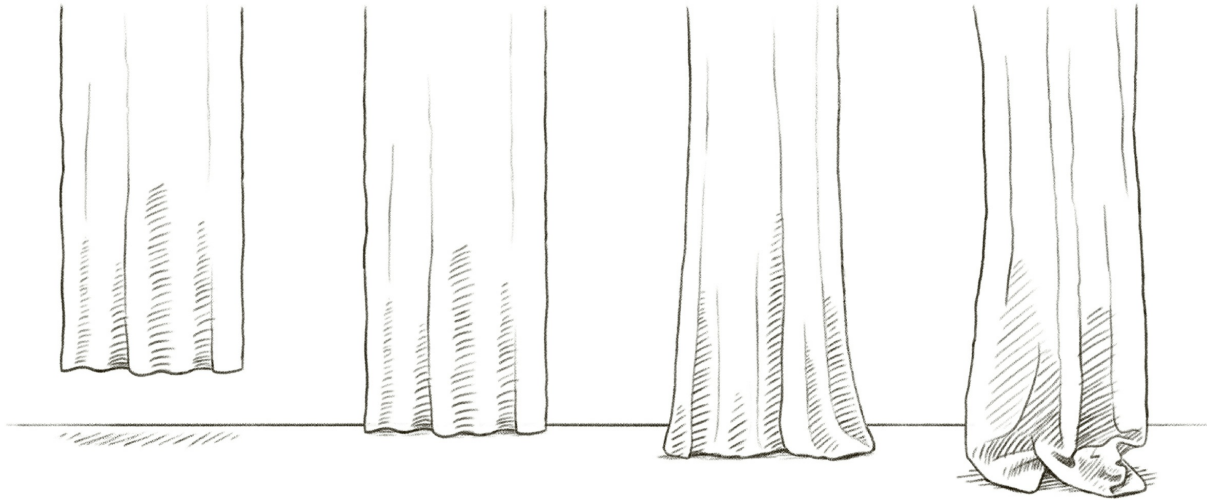
Don't fix the curtain rod too close to the upper edge of the window—that will make the window look smaller. Fix it well above the window—how high will depend on the distance to the ceiling, but at least 4 inches (10 cm) is recommended.



Don't let the curtains block out the light—hang them to the side of the window. This will also trick the eye into assuming that the window is bigger than it really is. But make sure the curtains will close enough to cover the whole window.



Don't be stingy with the material. To get the right amount of fabric, multiply the length of the curtain rod by one and a half or two.



No—high water!
It looks as if there
wasn't enough
material.

Yes—curtains just
kiss the floor. It looks
professional.

Not really—the curtains
touch the ground. (This
can look carelessly hung
or badly hemmed.)

Yes—in the right
surroundings: the
curtains “pool” on
the floor.

Valances

The length will depend on the size of the window and how much of it you want to cover.



A curtain often hangs better if it is double-hemmed along the bottom edge. You can also sew in weights, which will help thin curtains hang better.

Make the Style Fit the Room

We often choose the furniture for a room to reflect our needs, and we adjust the style to create the atmosphere we want. The practical use of a particular room can help us decide the best style for the window area.

Bathrooms

Bathrooms can easily be harsh and dull spaces, so the bathroom window—if there is one—offers an ideal place to introduce a softer touch by using green plants and a small still life. The window is also a good place to introduce plants to create privacy, or you may want to keep your beauty products there so you can get at them easily. I have arranged my favorite perfumes into a still life in a shady upstairs bathroom window—it means they are convenient when I want to use them, and they make a pretty arrangement. If you are thinking about doing the same, always check the direction the window faces, as your creams and scents will not survive the heat if they are sitting in the sun all day. Depending on the size of the bathroom window, you may want to think about having a curtain or, for the sake of privacy, using window film or a canvas stretcher frame.

Kitchens

You can make the kitchen window reflect the function of the room by using the sill to store practical items arranged in a decorative way. Combine houseplants with everyday things you want at hand in the course of the day; this will naturally depend on where the window is in relation to the countertop and the table. A nice pestle and mortar, a pretty water jug, a set of old scales, a hand-thrown bowl, or a plate of tomatoes ripening in the sun—these are just the things to put alongside potted plants.

Because of the risk of cooking smells and spillage, it's unusual to have floor-to-ceiling curtains in the kitchen. Whether Roman blinds, short valances, or screens are most suitable for you will naturally depend on the shape of the room and the location of the window, but try to make use of ideas from your own interiors style or from the period and design of the house. If you have a bistro-type kitchen, classic café curtains would be appropriate. If it's country style, then classic Roman blinds are perfect, and if it's Art Deco inspired and the window is closer to the table than to the oven, full-length curtains would be absolutely wonderful, even in the kitchen.

Living Rooms

Living room curtains are often large and generous so that they can provide shade from the sunlight. It's a good idea to have double curtains in this room: a thinner

fabric to filter the light and provide some privacy, and a heavier fabric to completely darken the room if you want to watch a film or play computer games. Depending on the style of the room and the size of the windows, you can use the windowsill to create small still lifes with candlesticks, books, vases, and other objects, along with plants and lights.

Bedrooms

Most people will aim for a calm and harmonious atmosphere in the bedroom so that they can start and finish the day in a relaxed way. It's a good idea to choose curtains that have a generous amount of fabric because that will muffle sound in the room and give it a snug feel. Choose floor-to-ceiling curtains, preferably on a rail or rod that allows the curtains to shut out all the light when it is time for sleep. Big green plants will produce oxygen during the night. Create a pleasant, homey atmosphere in the room, with plenty of mood lighting to complement the general overhead lighting and reading lamps by the bed. Window lamps that can be dimmed will give a calm mood in the evening and a gentle start to the day.

Study/Workroom

My workroom faces northeast, and to provide enough shade to work comfortably at the computer I have chosen a straight valance and pleated white fabric at the window rather than a venetian blind. Deciding which curtains will best suit your home office will depend—among other things—on the direction the room faces. I have big green plants on my windowsill, along with my tools (tins of pens, brushes, and rulers) arranged into small still lifes. I also have photographs of the family and a pretty paperweight. It's always better to come up with a design using objects that naturally belong in the room, as well as things that will trigger positive feelings for the person working there.

Children's Rooms

When children are really small, the kind of things we usually use to design the window can be a problem. Lamps run the risk of being knocked over, and many plants turn out to be poisonous when a child decides to taste the leaves. So it's better to use the windowsill for special toys, books, Lego constructions, and puzzles. If you want to create changes of level, hang something nice from the top edge of the window—a pendant lamp, a flowerpot, a pretty mobile with glass prisms, or a small figurine suspended on a thread so that it moves and makes shadows and reflections in the room. It will be something peaceful to look at if the child can't go to sleep, and the idea is just as suitable for a teenager's room as for a baby's, though you might want to choose different figures.

Houseplants for Windows That Face Different Points of the Compass

Think of the natural needs of the plant when buying houseplants for the windowsill. Even though they have been cultivated locally, many of the plants we use in our designs originate from other parts of the world and from environments with very different conditions of humidity and light. By selecting species that suit the conditions in your window (direction and temperature, for instance), the plant is more likely to flourish. Sunlight and warmth will be radically different from one window to another throughout the day. In the Northern Hemisphere, the following tips will be helpful.

North-Facing Windows: Cool and Shady

Choose... green, nonflowering plants and plants with large, soft leaves. Plants whose natural habitat is on the ground are suitable here, as they need less in the way of light and are more likely to survive in a north-facing window.

Remember... not to stand the plants too far back in a room with a north-facing window, because then they may not get sufficient light to survive. All plants need light in order to photosynthesize.

South-Facing Windows: A Lot of Light and Occasional Strong Sun

Choose... plants that thrive when they have a lot of sun and warmth. Plants with patterned and partly colored leaves usually need a light position. The more white there is in the leaves, the more sun is needed. Thick-leaved and tropical plants from dry, desert zones (cacti, succulents, and other plants that have spikes or are covered with hairs) can survive on south-facing windows with a great deal of sun.

Remember... south-facing windows can become very hot indeed on sunny days in summer. Remember to water and spray the plants more frequently—but not in the middle of the day, when the sun may heat up the drops of water on the leaves and burn the plant.

East- and West-Facing Windows: Plenty of Light but No Strong Midday Sun

Choose... whatever you like best, as most plants will thrive here.

Remember... what may be outside the window. A building, a large tree, a balcony, or another structure can cut out so much sunlight that the window ends up with as little as a north-facing window. Bear this in mind when choosing your plants.



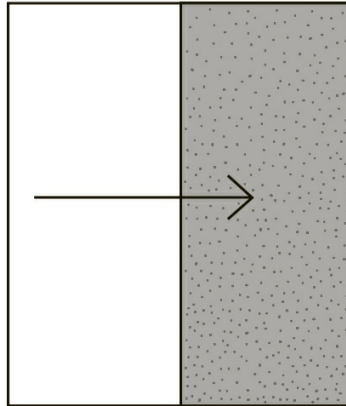
Just because indoor plants are indoors, do not ignore the natural cycle of the seasons! No plants flower all year round, and there are some plants that, in their natural environment, hibernate during the winter season, so they need to be allowed to rest during the winter. Geraniums (genus *Pelargonium*), for instance, need to stand in a cool, dark place during the winter in order to put out new shoots and renew their magnificent foliage when spring comes. It's a good idea to have one set of summer plants and another set of winter plants, just as people had summer and winter curtains in the old days.

Fixing the Acoustics

When moving into newly built apartments and houses with an open-plan design, many people discover that they have problems with the acoustics. The hard outer skin of the building, combined with an absence of walls and doors, means that sound vibrations have free play and can present a challenging auditory environment. Fortunately, there are some design tricks that can muffle problem noise and echoes.

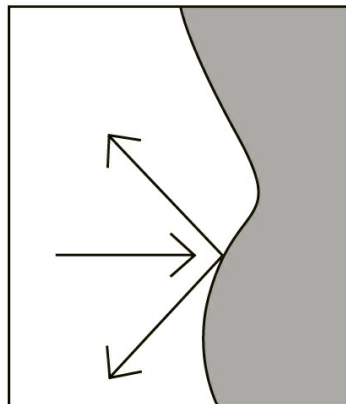
Absorption

Annoying sound reflections in a room can be absorbed by using acoustic absorption surfaces. A room that is sound-insulated too well, however, can feel oppressive and uncomfortable, so it is important to get the balance right and not absorb too much.



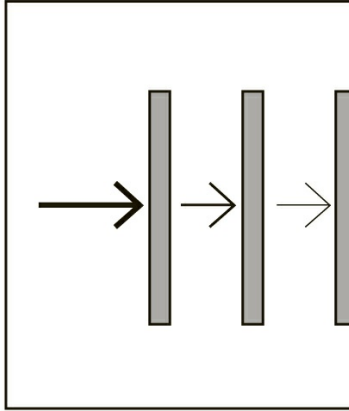
Diffusion

Rather than absorbing the sound waves, it is possible to use diffusion to break them up and spread them around.



Damping

A room can be divided into smaller areas (acoustic zones) by using furniture and panels to form various barriers to the sound waves.



Textiles

Soft textiles have sound-absorbent properties. Curtains, pillows, throws, tablecloths, drapes, and tapestries can all be used to make annoying sounds magically disappear. The heavier the fabric, the more effective it is in absorbing sounds. Think wool, velvet, and textiles that have a tight weave. Think about using floor-to-ceiling curtains, and if you put up a double ceiling rail or rod, you can have one thin layer that allows light to enter while ensuring privacy, and a thicker, heavier curtain that blocks out daylight. In order to be really efficient, the curtains should hang at least 4 inches (10 cm) from the wall, and the more pleats you have in the curtain, the more effective it will be at muting sounds.

Bookshelves

Books and full bookshelves are excellent sound dampers. Because of the material they are made of and their irregular shapes, they break the sound waves up rather than bouncing them back. In open-plan homes, bookcases used as room dividers also act as barriers to sound waves.

Upholstered Furniture

Sofas, armchairs, ottomans, and other upholstered furniture help to diminish bass sounds. In open-plan living, upholstered furniture with backs can also function as sound barriers, so it is worth experimenting with the placement of the furniture. Two sofas facing each other in the middle of the room, for instance, can offer a design alternative to one larger sofa against the wall.

Rugs

Rugs deaden the sound of footsteps across hard wooden flooring. Big, soft long-pile rugs or wall-to-wall carpeting are excellent for absorbing sound in bedrooms or in playrooms with really bad acoustics: they do, however, have to be thick, as thin rugs make very little difference.

Sounds You May Find Disturbing

- Hard surfaces that emit annoyingly persistent echoes
- The slamming noise made by outside and inside doors, armoires, kitchen cupboards, and drawers
- Footsteps across the floor
- Chair legs scraping on the floor
- The noise of appliances such as fridges, freezers, dishwashers, washing machines, and clothes dryers
- Ventilation and air-conditioning systems and fans
- The roar of flushes and other water noises
- Computers and electronics
- Busy roads outside the house
- Buses, emergency vehicles, cars, trains, and subways
- Airplanes
- The noise made by nearby construction or renovation work
- The distant sound of schools, day care centers, and playgrounds
- Poor insulation that allows sounds from the room next door to be heard

Plants

Green plants with large leaves can help block noise from reaching large, hard areas of glass, such as windows. Corners also contribute to a poor acoustic environment, so don't limit yourself to plants in the windows, but place large indoor trees, creepers, and climbing plants in empty corners.

Hard and Soft Materials

Hard furniture, big metal lampshades, display cabinets with glass doors, concrete and glass tabletops—all these things can make annoying acoustics even worse. If you move into a newly built home, think strategically and seek out soft and sound-absorbent materials when you are buying furniture and equipment.

If the acoustics of your home prove almost insufferable, it is possible to buy sound-absorbing panels to fit on the walls, the ceiling, or even under large tabletops.

Choose Music Rather than Annoying Acoustics

You may have noticed that hotels, shops, and restaurants use music to create mood. It almost always consists of a soft background of sound that manages to induce a positive feeling in spite of the clatter of the restaurant and the chattering voices in the lobby. It is worth trying the idea at home. By playing soft music in the background, you may be able to drown out the other sounds you find irritating. Some hotels have their own playlists or CDs, and you may be able to borrow their selections.

Size-Related Challenges

We can't always be satisfied with every aspect and the character of the house we live in. For some it's too small, for others the ceilings are too low, and for others again it's all too big, empty, and echoing. There are, however, a number of tricks you can use to change the way you experience your home and the things you're unhappy with.

In this section I am going to tell you some design tricks to make your rooms bigger or smaller—or rather, to create the illusion that they are bigger or smaller. The most frequent questions of this kind relate to making a small space feel bigger, but there are some people who feel they have the opposite problem—too much space on their hands, and they find it impossible to create a snug, cozy atmosphere.

Making a Room Feel Bigger

If you are living in a small space and want to make it feel bigger, you should try the following suggestions.

Choose a Light Color Scale

Stick to fresh, light colors on the walls, ceiling, and furniture—that will make it feel much more spacious than if you use dark colors.

Keep the Windows Free and Let the Light In

You want as much daylight coming into the room as possible, so don't block the window areas with bulky furnishings. Designers usually recommend that you avoid placing furniture where it blocks out light.

Design to Scale

Furniture that is too big and clumsy can easily make a room feel overfurnished and constricted. Suit your interior design to the measurements and nature of the small room. Read more about this in the sections that discuss the rule of thirds (see [this page](#)) and varying the size and scale (see [this page](#)).

Choose Light Textiles and Proportions

Dark, heavy textiles can bring a small room down and shrink it. They can also muffle and spoil the acoustics. To create a lighter atmosphere, choose light and gauzy textiles. Read more about this in the section on visual weight (see [this page](#)).

Create Optical Illusions with Lines

Vertical lines make the ceiling seem higher than it really is, whereas horizontal lines give a room more width. So it's better to have tall, slim cupboards than low, wide sideboards. Read more about lines in "Magic Tricks with Lines" ([this page](#)).

Using Mirrors

Mirrors are good: they make the room seem larger, and they also help to spread light around the room. The bigger the mirror, the more effective it is.

Accentuate the Corners

Lighting and designing the corners of the room often make the room feel bigger than if you leave those areas empty.

Choose Pictures That Use Perspective

Stop and think before you choose the pictures. Scenes that have perspective (e.g., landscapes and artwork with converging lines) can add depth and space to the room.

Choose Shallower Bookcases and Bureaus

If you are in the position to choose, go for less deep models of bookcases, sideboards, and bureaus. Some suppliers sell furniture in a number of different depths, and if you pick furniture that is shallower than the standard depth, it can trick the eye into assuming the room is larger. Choose a depth of 12 to 16 inches (30 to 40 cm) rather than 24 inches (60 cm)—it doesn't sound like much, but it can make a big difference in a small space.

Free Up the Floor Space

A room in which a lot of floor space is visible usually seems bigger than it is. This is a trick used by real estate agents: you must surely have seen photos in which there are no rugs on the floor and fewer pieces of furniture than in a normal home. It's a conscious trick to make a room seem larger and airier than it really is.

To create the optical illusion of having more floor space than you do, hang your shelves on the wall, choose glass side tables and neater pieces of furniture, and take care with the spacing of the furniture. (Make sure there is space between the pieces.)

Use Dead Areas

The compact-home owner exults in his or her ability to locate and use those last invisible square inches of space for storage. By optimizing dead spaces (under the bed, in kitchen cupboards, under the sofa, inside doors, under the bathroom sink), you can find room for extra storage in clever drawers and baskets, on hooks, or with built-in solutions.

Making a Room Feel Smaller

When I give talks to building companies or to private individuals who have bought new homes, I'm often asked how to deal with space in open-plan settings. Many modern houses are very airy and spacious, which, in itself, is a good thing, but it does present a challenge—how do we set about creating more secluded and cozy corners? What can we do to shrink a room that feels too large and thus introduce a snug, more intimate atmosphere? We can start by rereading the section above on how to make a room feel larger, then do the opposite! Choose a darker color palette, avoid mirrors, and paper the walls with patterned papers since they tend to make large walls seem smaller. But there are also a number of smart furnishing dodges that will help overcome the absence of internal walls.

Zoning

If a room lacks natural divisions between its various practical functions (kitchen, dining space, living room, for instance), you can create zones either by your choice of color on the walls or by arranging the furniture in clear groups. With the help of visual markers like color, wallpaper, and rugs, as well as space dividers like long sideboards, bookcases, and side tables, you can achieve the feel of rooms within the room. Always work from the main function of each zone (cooking, eating, socializing, relaxing), and optimize each section for that purpose.

Furnish from the Middle Outward

In large rooms, the floor area has much less impact on furnishing than in smaller rooms. So you can start from the middle of the room and furnish outward, or arrange groups of furniture as freestanding islands rather than lined up along the walls.

Design the Lighting in Zones

The ability to dim the lighting to a softer setting is a great help when you are trying to achieve a cozy feel in a large room with open spaces. You can invest in wall-mounted dimmer lights or buy freestanding lamps with the same function. Don't think of the large room as a single unit. Instead, design the lighting in zones so that the lighting itself helps to clearly demarcate the different spatial zones and creates a cozy sense of separateness in spite of the absence of real walls. Hang lamps over the tables, and make sure that there are obvious circles of light defining the zones you want to create.

Textiles Can Help

A large and spacious room will seem less echoey if you use an abundance of textiles and soften the walls, the floor, and the furniture with generous lengths of fabric. It will improve the acoustics (see "Fixing the Acoustics," [this page](#)) and will also help you create a warm, snug atmosphere.

Continue Above Head Height

It may sound counterproductive to continue the design above your head if you dislike the generous ceiling height of the room. My feeling, however, is that a room in which the details stop at head level tends to look less cozy than a room in which the designer has used the height as an opportunity. Right up to the ceiling in places! Take the risk and go for it, and the overall result will be more cohesive. I forced myself to think that way when I was designing my photographic studio at the Spinning House, an old industrial building with a ceiling height of 13 feet (4 meters). So I really did go for it, making an enormous wall of pictures that went right up to the ceiling, putting up shelving considerably higher than usual, and creating a completely different—but warmer—feeling than if everything had been placed at the usual height and level.

Avoid Putting the Sofa with Its Back to the Door

Designers often advise you to avoid placing a sofa with its back to the entrance to the room. The idea is that not having a view of the whole room and of what is going on behind your head can be an unsettling feeling. Read the section about Isovist (see [this page](#)) for more thoughts on this topic.

Avoid a Bowling Alley

It is quite common to see furniture pushed back and lining the walls, which results (unfortunately) in a bowling alley or, worse still, a dance floor of unused space in the middle of the room. This often happens in open-plan homes in particular. Try to get rid of your preconceived notions about how furniture should be arranged, how you always used to arrange it, and how previous owners or neighbors arranged it in similar rooms. Challenge yourself to come up with new solutions! The worst thing that can happen is that you have to put the furniture back where it was.

The Bookcase

These days, many people use their bookshelves for holding other things as well as books, either consciously or while they are waiting to have enough titles to fill them. The bookcase is often the biggest—and consequently the most obvious—piece of furniture in the room, which means that if it isn't pleasing, it can be really irritating. But whether you just want books or a mix of books and ornaments, how do you go about styling bookshelves? Here are a few ideas I've picked up over the years.

Books in Alphabetical Order

Sorting books in alphabetical order according to the surname of the author is the most logical model, particularly if you are one of the people who has shelves full of books and wants to find a title quickly. Fiction volumes tend to be roughly the same size, so if most of the books you have are of this kind, alphabetical order is probably the simplest style to work with. This is not to say that alphabetical order cannot be combined with any of the following approaches.

Arrange by Size

Assuming that all the books are not the same size and that you aren't too worried about alphabetical order, an arrangement according to the size of the books is probably most restful on the eye. From small to large—or vice versa.

Highest or Lowest Point in the Middle

An alternative to arranging the books from high to low (or low to high) is to have the high point or the low point in the middle of the shelf. This introduces a different shape, and that, in turn, will allow you to create some variation from shelf to shelf.

Books as Bookends

If you don't have enough books to fill the whole shelf, a good and useful way of finishing the shelf is to lay some of the books on their sides, spines facing the front, and to use them as bookends to support the others.

Rainbow Arrangement

The phenomenon of color-sorted bookshelves spread like wildfire on social media a few years ago. The basic idea was to arrange the spines of the books by color, with the aim of making the shelf resemble the rainbow. Irrespective of whether you have the whole spectrum of colors available in your home library or you have to be satisfied with a more neutral range, this can be an excellent alternative way of styling the bookcase.

Wrapping Paper

Another method used by commercial stylists and real estate agents to anonymize or “calm” a bookcase in advertising photos is to cover all the books in the same wrapping paper. You can do the same. Vary the color of the covers according to your own taste and write the titles on the spines of the books in your best handwriting.



Things You Could Use to Complement the Books

- Stacks of newspapers
- Magazine files
- Boxes and cartons for small items
- Tins
- Vacation memories such as shells, pebbles, and souvenirs
- Sculptures
- Vases in a variety of materials
- New candles or old candle stumps in a glass jar
- Display cases and glass domes
- Framed photographs
- Houseplants and plants that trail down from the shelf

Odds and Ends

Many other things apart from books look good out in the open on a high shelf or a big shelving system. All sorts of bits and pieces and ornaments that you have collected can add character to an ordinary row of books. Shapes, whether round, organic, or triangular, will make the shelf less static and more interesting to look at.

Sloping Books

Unlike fiction, larger books, or so-called coffee-table books, are of many and very different sizes, and they often have covers that are better presented lying flat or on the slope. If you have many of these books, it's a good idea to invest in a bookcase that has one or more slightly tilted shelves designed for displaying books. The whole bookcase does not need to be built the same way—indeed, it can be particularly elegant to have some tilted shelves mixed in with standard shelves.

Ways of Creating Balance in the Bookcase

An untidy, unstructured bookcase can make a room feel messy and unpleasant, whereas a well-organized bookcase with carefully placed books and curios can have the opposite effect—the whole room feels better designed and more cohesive.

If you place nothing but books in the bookcase, you will, of course, have only the color and size of the spines of the books to work with, but there is an inherent structure there anyway, because of the long and repeated lines of books.

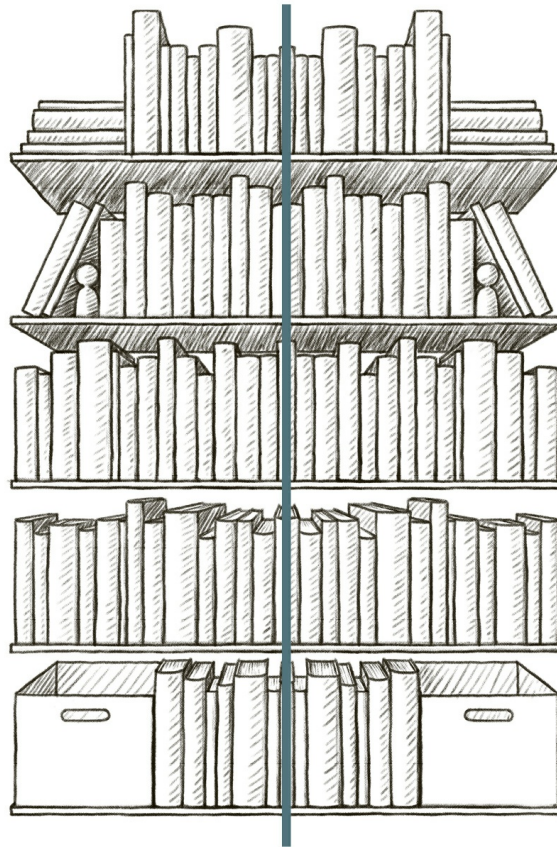
On the other hand, if you decide not to fill the bookcase with only books but with a mixture of other items, you will be giving yourself more of a challenge when it comes to creating the kind of repetition and structure that makes the design as a whole restful to the eye. But there are some good tricks you can use.



1. Avoid the temptation to place candles or candlesticks on a bookcase, even as decoration. Someone may be thoughtless enough to light them, then you'll end up with a hole burnt in the shelf above or, worse, with the house on fire.
2. If you want to mix books and other bits and pieces, don't fill the shelves completely. Leave about 30 percent of the shelf empty—that way the composition will seem less crowded.
3. Think about visual weight and place the heaviest books and objects on the lower shelves.

The Reflection Trick

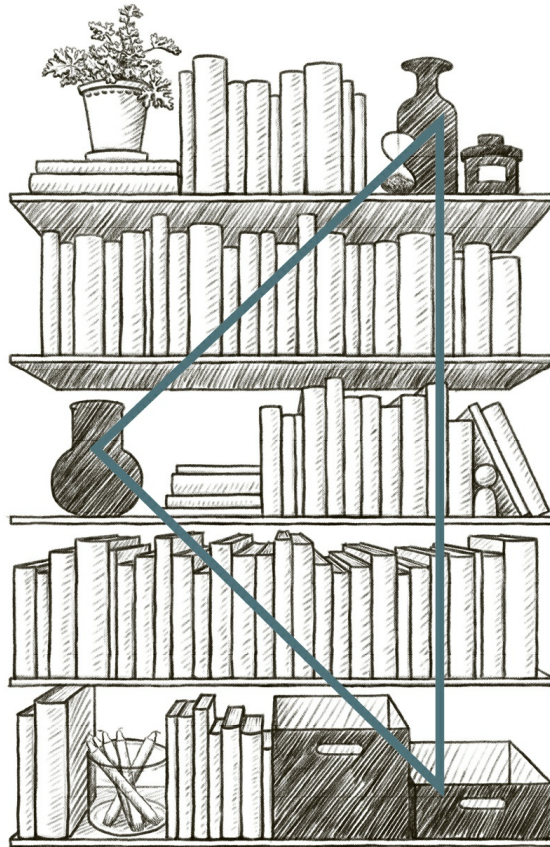
Using the principle of mirror symmetry, you can make each shelf reflect itself, thus producing a feeling of calm and balance. Even if the half shelf is untidy in itself, the fact that its untidiness is mirrored in reverse brings a sort of order to the whole.



The Reflection Trick

The Triangle Method

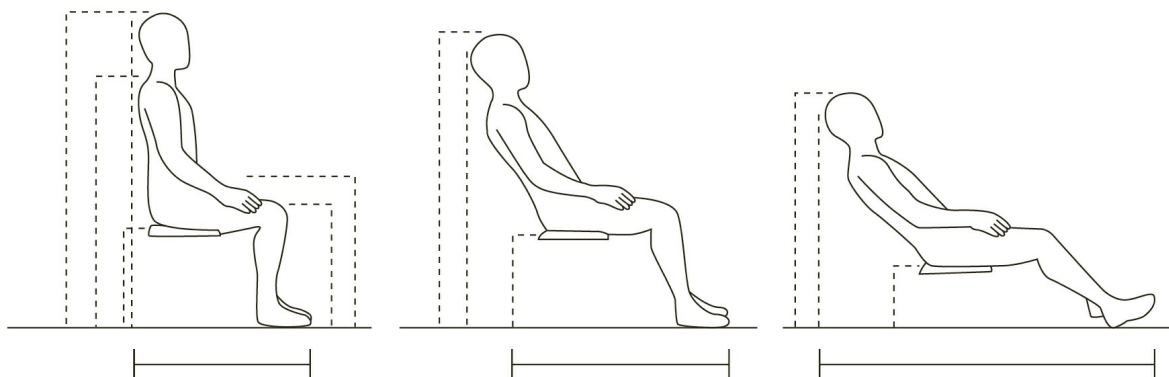
Thinking in triangles is a good approach if you are placing decorative items on the bookcase; it's a way of creating fixed points for the eye. By choosing three objects of the same color, or of the same material, and positioning them on the bookcase so that they form a triangle, the eye is given a line to follow. You could, of course, arrange several triangles on the same bookcase depending on how many fixed points you want among the books.



The Triangle Method

Sofas, Armchairs, and Coffee Tables

They say the kitchen is the heart of the home, but in that case what should we call the living room, where we so often come together to socialize, to be entertained, or to just relax for a while? It is an enormously important part of our homes, but since we use it in so many different ways, it can be quite challenging to come to grips with. What I've done in this section is to bring together a collection of useful styling tips that may help us when we are designing rooms with sofas, armchairs, and coffee tables. How do we start thinking about dimensions, positioning, still lifes, and decorative pillows, for instance? If you need advice about such things, I hope some of these methods and tips will come in handy.



How you sit on a sofa or armchair is not only a matter of comfort, but it also affects measurements. A semi-recumbent position takes up more space than sitting upright.

Style Versus Comfort

Since these pieces often make up the largest group of furniture in our living or family rooms, the sofa and chairs send out an important message about the aesthetic and functional feel we are trying to create. Given their size, they tend to drown out any other stylistic clues in the room, which is why it is so important that, in choosing them, we stick to our red thread (see [this page](#)) or, at the very least, do not allow things to move in a direction different from what we had planned—not if we want to retain the coherence of our interior design, that is.

Many of the people who are frustrated by their inability to get the right feel in their living rooms are actually missing the elephant in the room. They have become blind to that big black leather sofa that their partner brought with them, or that completely out-of-proportion seating unit they moved from their last place, which no longer has a purpose and doesn't go with the style they now want to create. So they furnish around these things, trying various combinations in an attempt to get the right feel but somehow never managing to pull it off.

If that is the situation in which you find yourself, you will have to make a decision: either you accept that big piece of furniture rather than work against it, or you replace it. You may be able to sell it secondhand, or perhaps trade it in as a partial exchange for a different model.

If you are on the point of buying a new furniture set, my best advice is to curb your enthusiasm as much as possible. You can, of course, follow your gut feeling if you are absolutely sure of what you want, but unless you are, I advise you to avoid making hasty decisions about bulky and expensive pieces of furniture. They are costly to replace—both for you and for the earth's resources—and you could feel locked in to a specific style for a long time to come.

If you are at all unsure, it is almost certainly more sensible to spice up the place with some boldly patterned but easily replaceable pillows.



Sofas with reversible cushions have a much longer life span. Detachable covers on sofas can be cleaned and allow you to change the color or replace parts that get damaged.

There is no doubt that for people on the verge of buying such a large and expensive item as a sofa, style and appearance are important, but if your investment is to be money well spent, you need to think beyond appearance. What's your favorite way of sitting on sofas? Will the sofa be used by more than one person at a time, and, if so, have you thought about how they sit on sofas? Before you choose which model to buy, here are some of the questions you should ask:

- Is it important to be able to sit upright with your feet reaching the floor? In that case, buy a shallower, firmer design.
- Is it important to be able to lie semi-recumbent or to pull up your legs when you are on the sofa? In that case, buy a deeper, softer design.
- Do you or anyone else in the family have trouble bending down or getting up after sitting on their heels? In that case, buy a sofa with firm cushions and slightly taller legs.
- Do you have small children or family pets who will want to climb onto it? In that case, buy a sofa with shorter legs.



Avoid placing dark-color sofas in a south-facing room, because the strong sunlight will soon fade the covers.

The Height and Shape of the Coffee Table

A good general rule is that a coffee table should not exceed the length of the sofa. As to width, many designers recommend that the coffee table should be about two-thirds the width of the sofa. If you have a sectional sofa or divan sofa, the coffee table should be a different shape from the space in which it will be standing. For instance, if the space in front of the sofa is square, it is preferable to have a round, oval, or rectangular table rather than a square one: this will help break up the lines and create a more balanced composition.



The Coffee Table—Measurements to Think About

- **The width of the sofa:** The coffee table should not be more than two-thirds of the total width of the sofa.
- **Seating height:** The coffee table should be more or less the same height as the seating (plus or minus 4 inches / 10 cm).
- **The space in front of the sofa:** The coffee table should not be so large that it takes up the whole space, nor so small that you have to stretch to put down your coffee cup.

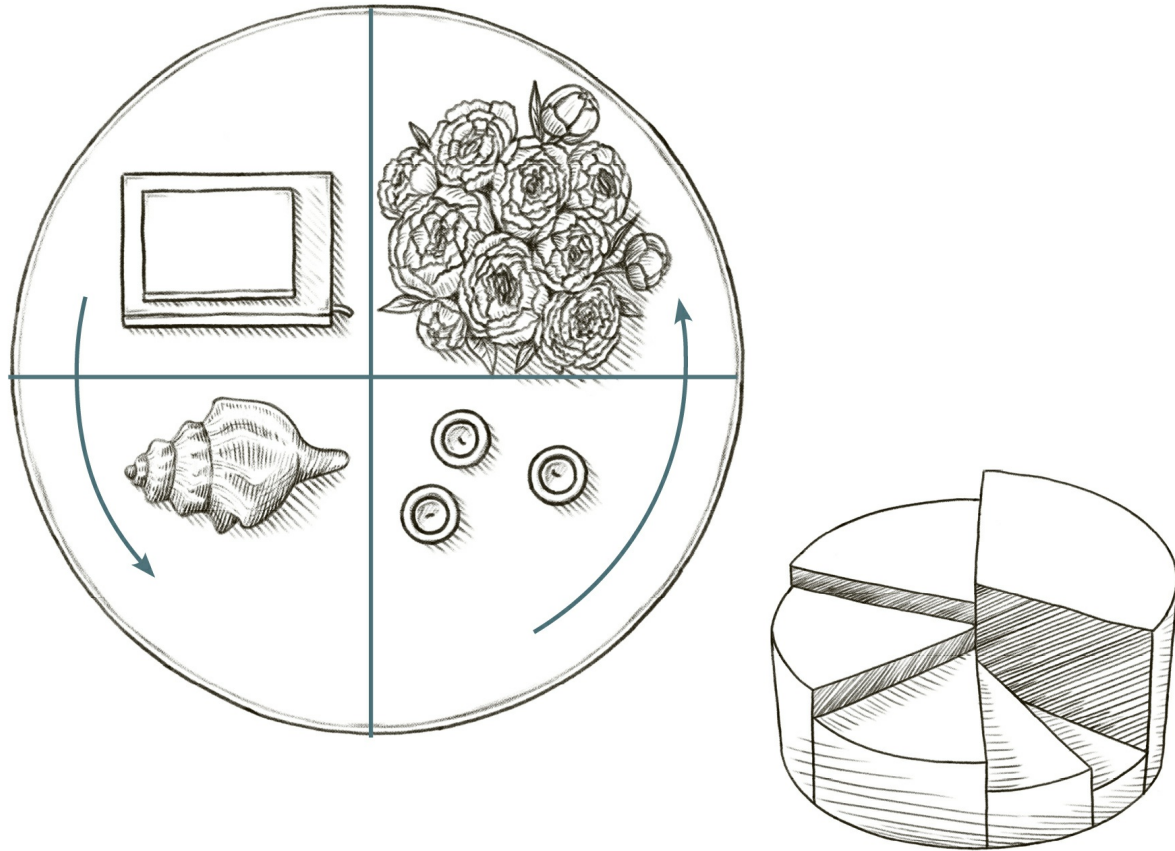
Also give some thought to the height of the coffee table. Depending on how you use it, it should be either a little higher or a little lower than the seating on the sofa. If you sit and eat there, or if you do the daily crossword at the coffee table, a low table means you will have to bend down, which can be uncomfortable. On the other hand, if you use the sofa for lounging around, a slightly lower table will feel more comfortable. In the case of a sectional or divan sofa, a slightly lower coffee table feels more balanced because it creates a step-by-step rise in the level of the furniture. A nest of tables with two or three parts can be a good alternative, as it provides a flexible solution that caters to both sitting and lying on the sofa. Glass tables or tables with slim legs and a thin tabletop are helpful if you are attempting to compensate for a room that feels too constricted.

Think of the Coffee Table in Zones

When you thumb through interiors magazines or read “at home” interviews, the coffee table is rarely empty, but when I visit friends who aren’t involved in design work, it almost invariably is.

Stylists and designers are quick to use the coffee table as a place for still lifes. The tabletop offers a rewarding location for groups of objects, both of a practical and an atmospheric sort. A number of the tips I gave in “Still Life Styling” ([this page](#)) will be useful here, and the principle of the golden spiral in “The Mathematics of Design” ([this page](#)) could also be helpful. Since the top of the coffee table is usually quite low, we have to remind ourselves that our usual view of it is from the side or diagonally from above.

Start by deciding which objects you want (and need) to have out in the open, and then try to find things from the following categories.



Shapes

- **Angular:** Square or rectangular objects such as books, boxes, newspapers, and plates.
- **Round:** Round and oval objects such as bowls, vases, or votives.
- **Organic:** Irregular and organic shapes that stand out from and enhance the more geometrical pieces. They may be, for instance, three-dimensional objects such as bowls, dishes, or candlesticks.

Materials

- **Something living:** Cut flowers, twigs, or houseplants.
- **Something transparent:** Glass or plexiglass.
- **Something wooden:** Bowls, dishes, or trays.
- **Something metal:** Brass, chrome, silver, tin, or copper.

Now, instead of looking at the tabletop as a whole, divide it into zones. Rectangular tables are usually divided into three zones, each of which will end up with a different height level. Square and round tables can instead be divided into four zones, and these will be designed with a stage-by-stage change in height to form a rising or sinking spiral.

Remember the golden ratio and Fibonacci’s spiral (see beginning on [this page](#)). You could, for instance, start with the top of a bouquet of flowers as your highest point and then work step by step downward to your lowest point, which might be a heap of books or newspapers, a flat dish, or some low votives. This approach is a

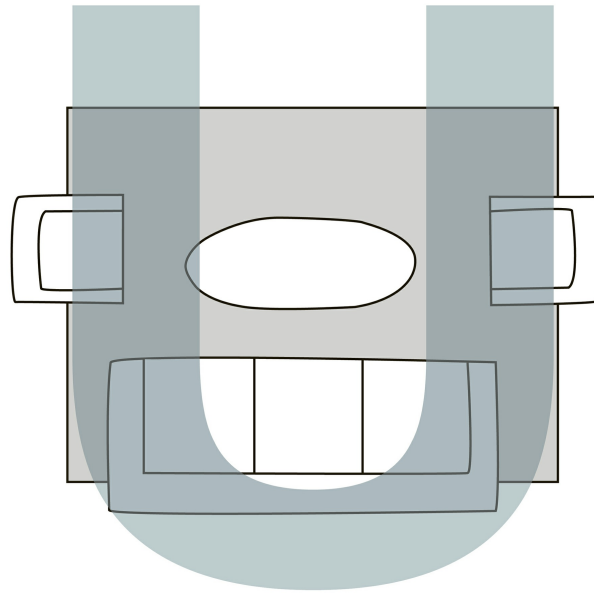
simple way of avoiding the lonely feel that results from having just one object in the middle of the table.

Things to Remember

1. When working with a still life on a rectangular table, follow the triangle technique and create different heights in the three zones by using (imagined) standing and leaning triangles.
2. It can be rewarding to apply ideas from the section on fukinsei and wabi sabi (see [this page](#)): include objects with patina or natural irregularity in one of the zones.
3. Your coffee table still life could also use a mini version of the color formula 60/30/10 + S Formula (see [this page](#)) to bring color and an exciting dynamic. Don't forget to add the touch of black!

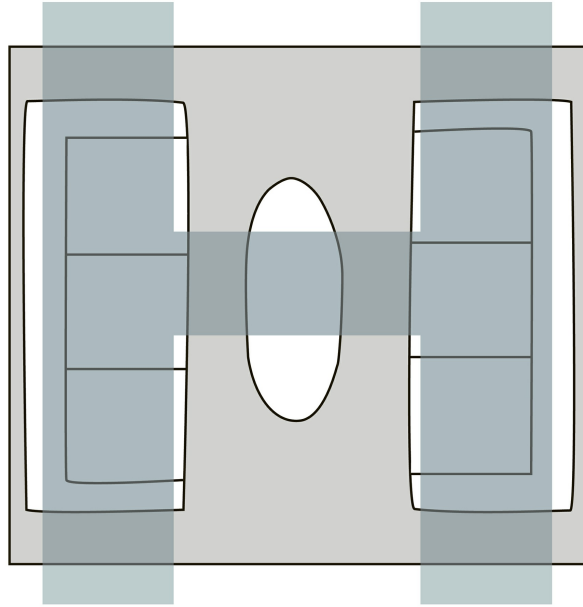
Seating Arrangements

I seem to see the same layout repeated in one home after another: a sofa, a coffee table, and a TV or media unit on the opposite side of the room. An arrangement of that kind makes the TV the equivalent of the fireplace in the room, whether you are watching it, eating, or chatting. To achieve a more positive layout for socializing, you need to arrange the seating so that people can look one another in the eye.



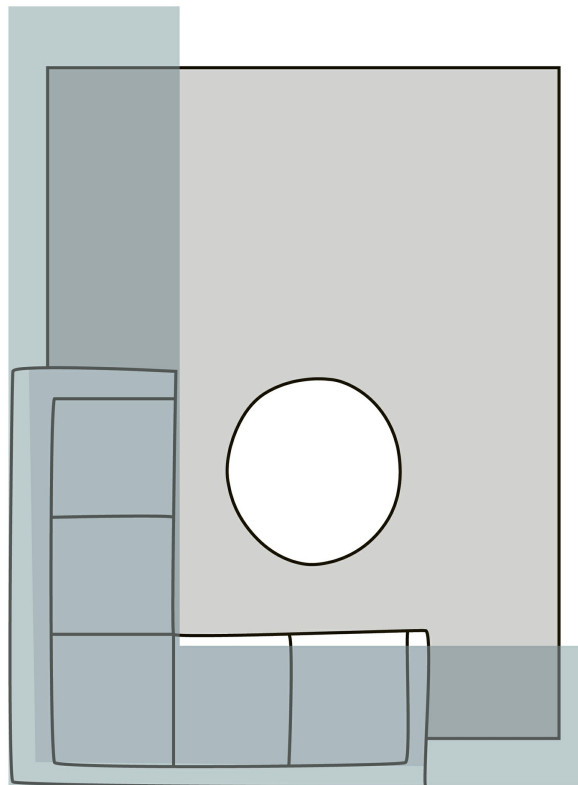
U-shape

A sofa and two armchairs still focuses on the TV or fireplace, but with better access for conversation and eye contact. This suits people who want to watch TV and socialize in the same location.



H-shape

Two sofas face to face, or one sofa with two armchairs opposite, is a good arrangement for conversation and eye contact. The TV or the fireplace is now secondary but can still be seen by everyone in the room.

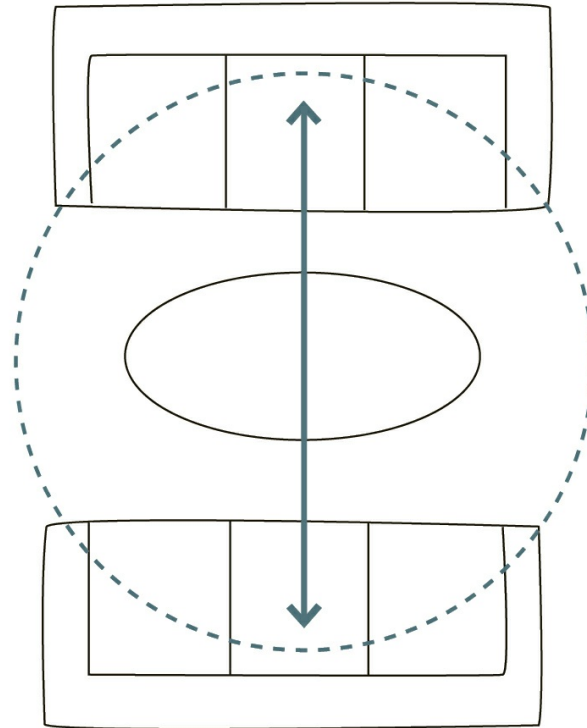


L-shape

A sectional sofa is the best solution if you want to arrange the seating in a corner, or if—in a larger room—you want to divide the room into zones. The simplest way to create this shape is with either a sectional or a divan sofa and an ordinary sofa with large footstools (assuming that the extension is being used for seating rather than as leg rests).

The Radius of Conversation

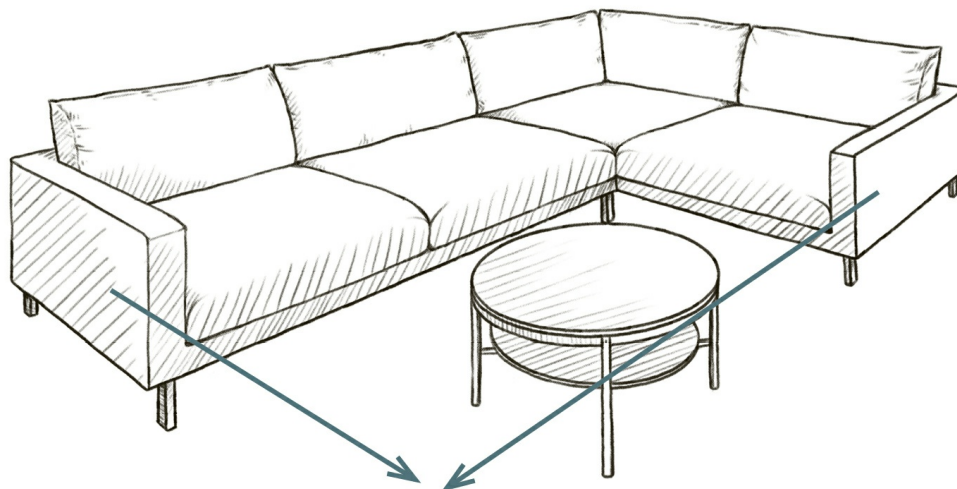
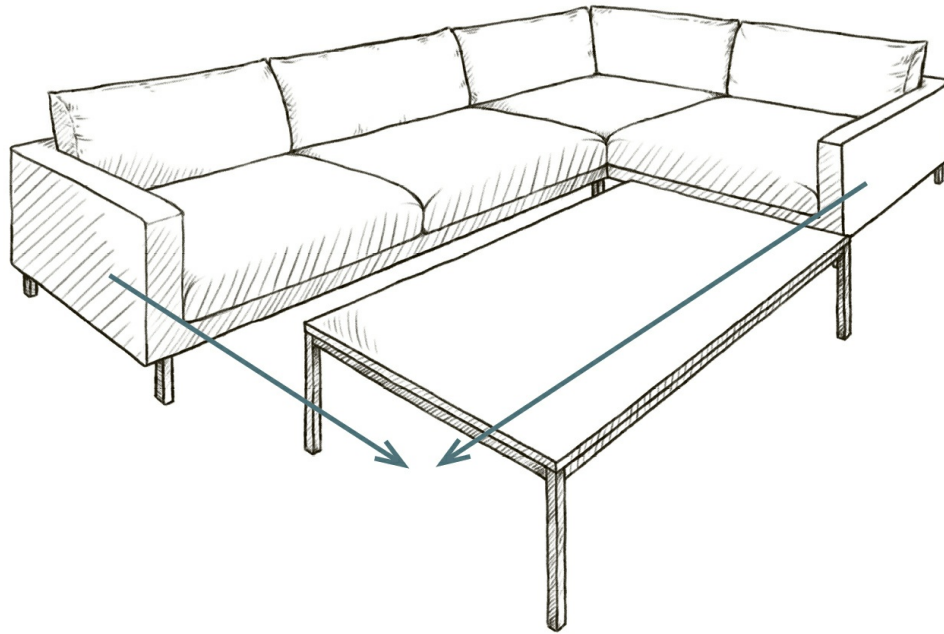
Give some thought to the distance between the seats. Even if you have plenty of space, don't place the furniture too far apart—people shouldn't have to raise their voices in order to converse. Designers usually recommend a radius of no more than 10 feet (3 m) when arranging seating for social interaction. If that arrangement feels too open and airy in relation to the room, the floor area can be filled out by placing a piece of low furniture (like a low bookcase or library table) behind the sofa.



How many people can you seat on a sofa? It is not always possible to tell from the number of cushions. Some three-seater sofas have three cushions, others have two or sometimes four. It's all a question of design. If you want to be sure, get out the measuring tape: designers reckon on each individual needing 24 inches (60 cm) of space.

Avoid Overcrowding

A divan sofa or a chaise longue needs space around it, or it will appear to be swallowing the room. Before you buy one, check that its proportions are right for the room in which it will live, and don't combine it with an oversize coffee table that takes up all the space in front of the sofa. It is important to leave open passageways or the room will feel cramped.



Choose a Big Rug

A rug big enough to take the whole sofa will help balance the room. A small rug in the middle merely emphasizes how enormous the sofa is.

Side Tables

Sectionals or divans often have more seats than an ordinary sofa, and it can be difficult for people sitting at the ends to reach the coffee table. A practical solution is to have side tables where people can put down their magazines and coffee cups.

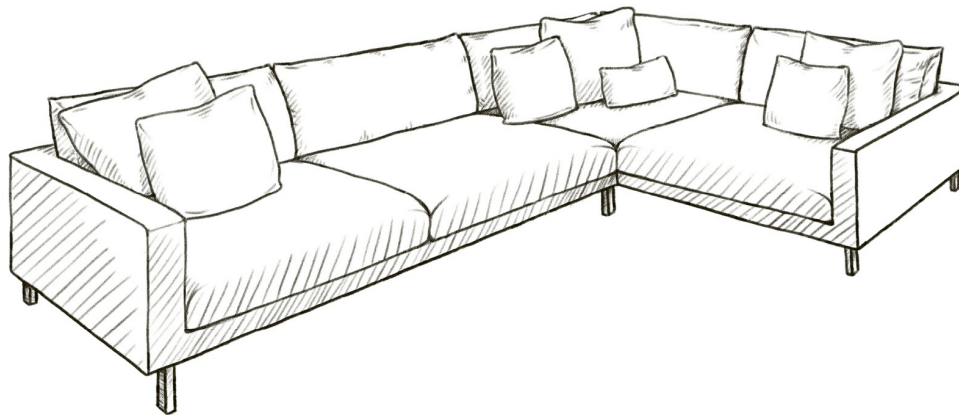
Lighting

A large sofa makes more demands on lighting than a small sofa—a single standard lamp or reading lamp is rarely sufficient. Consider how many people the sofa will seat and work out the number and balance of light sources necessary to serve them.

Sectional Sofa

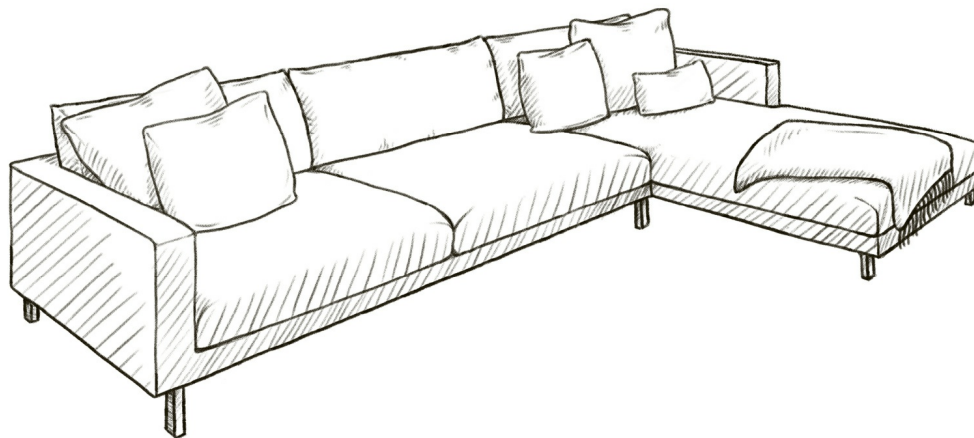
Interior design magazines and real estate agents' advertisements almost invariably show living rooms designed around two- or three-seater sofas, whereas reality seems rather different.

Here are a few tips on how to arrange decorative pillows on sectional and divan sofas. The trick is to work with different shapes and sizes, to combine them in groups, and to form triangles.



Styling a Chaise Longue

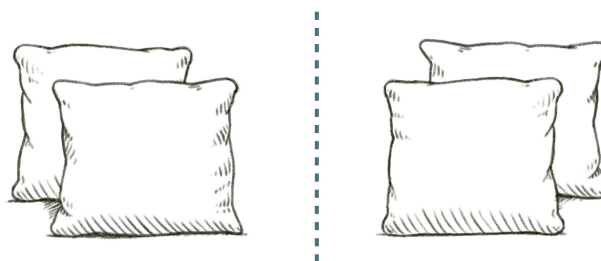
On an L-shaped sectional sofa, the best result is usually achieved by laying out the pillows in three places. It can, however, be awkward to place them on an open-ended chaise longue. In order to retain the coherence of the design, the solution here is to lay a throw or a sheepskin over the end or an accompanying footstool.



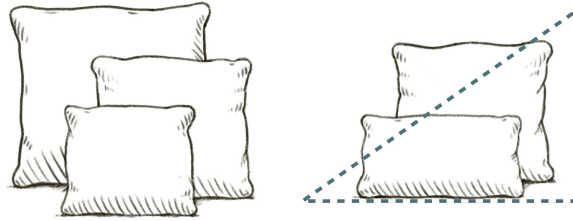
- Remember the odd-numbers rule (see [this page](#)).
- Use repetition and symmetry to create balance and achieve a more disciplined feel.
- In an asymmetrical arrangement, work with different sizes and shapes of pillows so that their outer edges form a triangle (see opposite page).
- If you want dynamism, avoid mirror symmetry. Do not place two identical pillows on each end: odd numbers and a mixture of different patterns break things up.

Placing Decorative Pillows

Depending on the mood they are trying to create, designers work in slightly different ways when placing decorative pillows. In an elegant and careful interior, they often use mirror symmetry and even groups of perfectly puffed-up pillows covered in exclusive fabrics. In more eclectic interiors, they tend to take a rather sweeping approach with more patterns and colors and an odd number of cushions.



Mirror symmetry



Asymmetry and triangle shapes



Odd numbers (2:1:2 method)

Pillow Karate

Anyone who has decorative pillows knows how easily they are flattened and squashed, and most people then fluff them up to get some bulk back into the filling. What most people haven't noticed, however, is what we might call the designers' karate chop!

If you study the pillows in interiors magazines (or in hotels), you will see what I mean: the cushions are rarely completely smooth. Just as tousled throws bring more life to an interior than neatly folded ones, pillows that have been given a shape seem more inviting. If the pillow insert is of good quality, the result is even better.

To put it simply, "pillow karate" just means putting a notch in the top of a fluffed-up cushion by giving it a karate chop. It may sound silly, but it is a standard trick among stylists when they want the pillows on a bed or sofa to have a slightly more casual look.

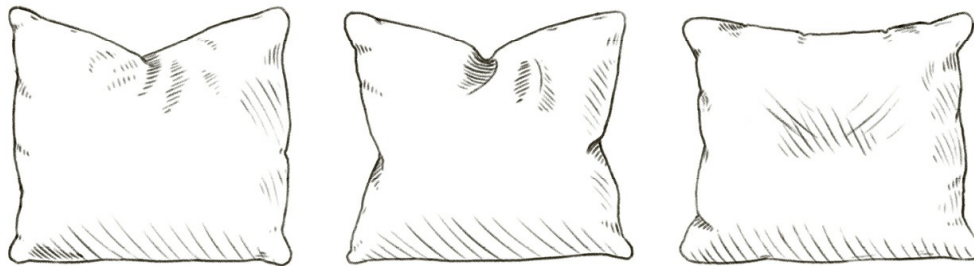
If the pillow cover is silk or another glossy fabric, the karate technique also creates a shadow effect that gives you a better sense of the fabric itself. And a notch on the upper edge of the pillows also has the effect of making strong patterns seem more pleasant.

There's another advantage, too: pillow karate is a good friend to families with small children since the notch and shadow conceal stains.

One strike = a chop at the top

Double strike = a chop at the top and one in the middle of each side

Tummy strike = a pat in the middle of the cushion



Dressing a Welcoming Bed

The most welcoming beds we ever see are those in the top hotels, magazines, and advertisements, but how do we get that wonderful feeling at home?

Many designers work with several layers of pillows and covers to achieve the effect they want, then they top it off with several details that don't show up to the naked eye.

Start with a Good Foundation (a Lovely Cover)

Making a bed successfully—one that will bring joy to whoever is going to sleep in it—is not just a matter of the choice of bedding and the number of pillows: it starts, like so many other things, with a good foundation.

Invest in fluffy duvets and top-quality pillows. Read the information sheet and check the filling's contents. The fact that it feels soft and downy when you buy it is

no guarantee that it will remain so after a couple of years. Down is controversial because feathers are not always collected in line with animal welfare, so don't be afraid to ask difficult questions to ensure that you are buying a good product. The down used in duvets usually derives from factory-farmed geese and ducks—the higher the proportion of goose down in the filling, the more expensive the duvet will be. It is also important to find out the “fill power” of the down (which is a measure of its loft or fluffiness; the higher the fill power, the better) and how free the down is of dust and particles.

Another factor that affects the feel and durability of a duvet is the construction of the pockets that contain the filling. These are usually either box stitch or baffle box. A badly sewn duvet loses its shape quite quickly and cannot be repaired, whereas it's possible to take a quality duvet in to have its filling changed.

Invest in a Bed Skirt

There is nothing like a pretty bed skirt or dust ruffle—along with the headboard—to lift a boring bed. As its name implies, it acts as a skirt below the mattress and hides ugly legs and anything stored under the bed. A bed skirt that is part of the same monochromatic color scheme as the bedding and the bedcover (and the headboard if it is covered with fabric) brings unity to the interior. But don't forget to steam or iron out the creases from the packaging before you put it on the bed.

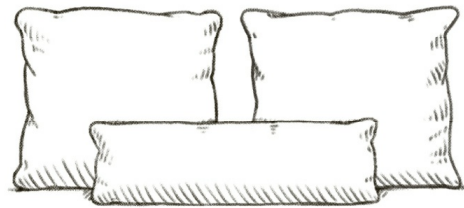
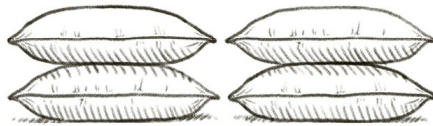
The Mathematics of Dressing a Bed

If you make the bed with two ordinary pillows, you are unlikely to create the same welcoming feeling as a hotel bed or advertisement. Designers usually work with many more pillows than that and, preferably, with pillows of different sizes. Without trying to re-create a real estate agent's scene in your own bedroom, if you move up from two pillows at the head of a full bed to four or five, it will make an enormous difference—visually and in terms of snuggling down in the bed! Here are a few suggestions about how the pillows might be arranged when you aren't actually sleeping in the bed.

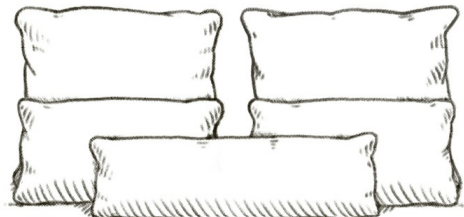
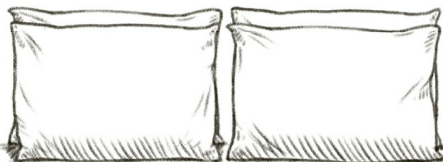
Two standard pillows, lying



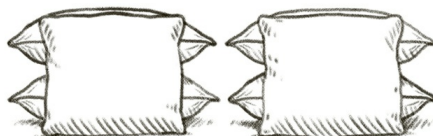
Double pillows, lying



Double pillows, standing



Double pillows, lying, plus two decorative pillows



The stylists who create advertising photographs often use more than one fluffy duvet and a good many more decorative bedcovers and throws than you would normally have at home. It is impractical to go quite that far, but using the principle of layer upon layer can make a big difference even in an ordinary home.



If you are working on a budget, a simple way to make a headboard is to take a mattress and wrap it in a plain linen bag made from a sheet. Lean the mattress against the wall at the head of the double bed and tuck in the excess material.

It's worth your while putting some thought into the choice of color. Dressing the bed in a number of different colors, tones, and shades will create an effect very

different from bedding in a single color. By consciously choosing to have the bottom sheet, duvet, and pillows in different colors, you will take dressing the bed to a new level.

Invest in a headboard that stands up. Most people who dress hotel beds lean the pillows up against the headboard rather than laying them flat on the bed. To do this, you need a headboard that sticks up above the biggest pillows, which are placed right at the back. The taller the headboard you choose, the more striking the arrangement will look.

And keep things to a minimum in the bedroom. The less there is to catch your attention, the more likely you are to sleep well. A good start is to clear everything off the bedside tables: you don't see irritating muddles of this and that on bedside tables in hotels or in photographs. Remember what we said about visual noise (see [this page](#))—so put everything away in a closed drawer unless you need immediate access to it. You can make room on the bedside table for a small plant, your alarm clock, a dish for pieces of jewelry (or anything you need to take off before going to sleep), the book you are reading, and a pretty carafe and a nice glass.

Interior Design with Plants

Living plants are an important part of an interior, introducing a natural element into an environment that consists largely of man-made materials. Apart from decorating the windowsill with plants appropriate to the room and the direction the window faces, there are many other ways we can use vibrant green leaves to help create a warm, homey atmosphere.

The Difference Between More Mature Plants and Off-the-Shelf Pots

When I was studying pictures of interiors closely in an effort to work out why some seemed more warm and cozy than others, I often felt that it was plants that made the difference, particularly big, strong plants that have been around for some years. Mature plants give a home character, perhaps because they have grown and reached their proper size and proportion. (Read more about the importance of size and proportion in bringing dynamism to interiors in “Vary the Size and Scale,” [this page](#).) Off-the-shelf potted plants do, of course, provide greenery, but I don't feel they have the same effect on a room as mature, established plants—particularly plants that have a history of their own. A plant you inherited, or a plant that has been with you ever since your first home, brings context and personality as well as greenery.

Something Inherited or Something Acquired

One way of acquiring older plants is to check with your family and friends: they may have the occasional large plant they are willing to give you. And adopting houseplants when their original owners have passed away can be a fine way of remembering those we love. I still regret that I didn't take over my grandmother's Christmas cacti, but I was a student and had no room for them. I comfort myself with the thought that I remember her in my heart whenever my own Christmas cacti flower.

Garden Centers and Specialist Florists

If you can't acquire older plants from those around you, I suggest you visit the local garden center, where they often have more mature plants for sale. And if they don't, they may be able to order them. You might be lucky and come across a specialist florist who sells more unusual houseplants that haven't been forced in the way the chain stores do.

Off-the-Shelf Plants on Steroids

If the only things available in your area are miserable little off-the-shelf plants, do what designers do. Buy a really big pot and some extra compost and then plant all the small plants together so that they look like one big, luxuriant plant!

Choosing a Plant Pot

1. How big is the plant? Think of size and proportion so that you choose the right pot. Different plants need different root space: ask about the size of the pot and the amount of soil needed. From an aesthetic point of view, the height of the pot should be in proportion to the size of the plant visible above the soil level: this is a chance to use the rule of thirds—one-third pot, two-thirds plant.
2. What is to be the focus of attention—the plant or the pot? Once you have decided which is the star and which is the backup, choose the color and material of the outer pot to fit in with that.
3. What is the dominant style of the room in which the plant is to live? Choose the color, shape, and style of the pot to coordinate.
4. The usual rule is that the outer pot should be about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (2 cm) bigger than the diameter of the inner pot in which the plant is actually growing. This is to allow air to circulate between the two.
5. Large pots need less watering than small pots because they hold the moisture longer.

Plants Within the Room

A big plant in a pot on the floor in the living room, or a pretty trailing plant in the bathroom, can make all the difference to the feel of a room. Take away the frame that climbers are often attached to and allow the plant to trail down from a shelf or glass cabinet. Houseplants can also be a good way of giving height to a still life on

a bureau, sideboard, or coffee table. If you are thinking of putting a houseplant in a part of the room where the light doesn't reach, choose one that will thrive in a north-facing window. Tropical plants that like moisture are a good choice for the bathroom; which are best for you will depend on whether the bathroom has access to daylight.

Hints for Creating Differences of Height and Level

- Flower table
- Pedestals
- Pots on stands
- Hanging flowerpots
- Flowerpots fixed to wall
- Wall vases
- Benches
- Old telephone tables
- Shelves and consoles
- Plant walls
- Plant curtains (climbing plants trained upward)

Clean Air

It's a good idea to choose houseplants that clean the air in the room. Devil's ivy, mother-in-law's tongue, and peace lily are cheap, good plants that remove dangerous substances such as benzene and formaldehyde from the atmosphere in the house. It's said that you need an awful lot of them to get a measurable effect, but better a little rather than nothing at all is my view.



It's worth buying plants you can take cuttings from. That way, you are not just investing in one houseplant, but you will be spreading the cost over many future plants. And if you don't want to keep them all yourself, you can swap the cuttings with other people and increase the number of species you have.

Move the Plants Out When You Are Renovating

It used to be said it was important to move the houseplants out for a few weeks if you were repainting, papering, or varnishing the floor, because the plants may be sensitive to strong smells and chemicals. These days, we hope the health and safety regulations for poisons and particles given off by indoor paints, wallpaper paste, and floor treatments are much stricter than in the past. But if you are worried about a particular plant, it's sensible to be safe rather than sorry and move it elsewhere until the house has been well and truly ventilated after renovating.

Rugs and Sizes

Designers often refer to a rug as the fifth wall of the room. It's an exciting thought, especially if you don't want to do any painting or papering. The color, shape, and, indeed, size of the rug you choose will, of course, make a huge difference. So, if the thought of making permanent changes is just too awful, rolling out a colorful, patterned rug could be the easier option.

The most common mistake I encounter is that people choose a rug that is much too small in relation to their furniture. And some people don't have any rugs at all—the usual reason is that they are so impractical, especially under the kitchen table. When I come across objections of this kind, I usually paraphrase the old saying “There is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothes,” and go on to insist that there are suitable, practical rugs; you just have to go out and find the right quality. If you are afraid of food being trodden in under the kitchen table, you obviously shouldn't tempt fate by putting a long-pile rug there—better to choose a naturally resistant, flat-weave woolen rug. But leaving the floor completely bare is rarely a good idea.

It's best to have a rug that can mirror the shape of the furniture standing on it—this avoids visual imbalance. A circular dining table works best on a round or square rug, whereas a rectangular or oval dining table is better on an oblong rug. In the living room, the zones you are trying to create are paramount, but a good basic rule is that a rug should “embrace” the furniture that stands on it. But how far out beyond the furniture should it extend? That depends mainly on the size of the room and the size of the furniture. The usual recommendation is that you should leave 10 to 16 inches (25 to 40 cm) of free floor between the rug and the walls.

The Size of the Room

The rug shouldn't be too small, nor should it swallow the floor and take over the room—not unless you are using it to hide poor or damaged floors. The general rule is small rugs for small rooms, big rugs for big rooms.

The Size of the Furniture

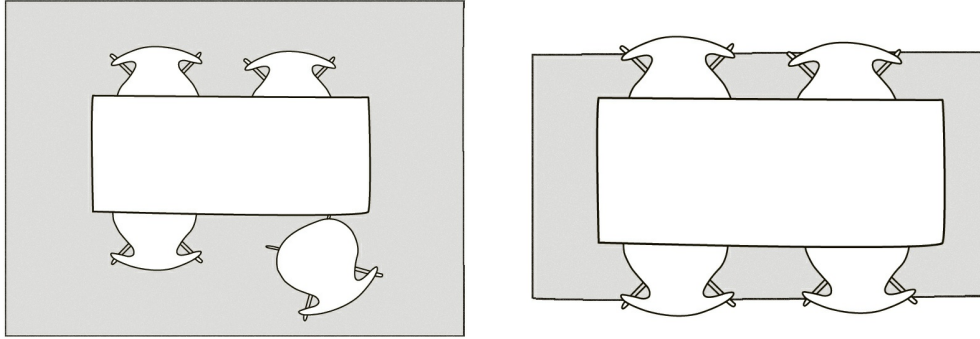
The rug size is determined by the furniture that will stand on it. One basic rule is that the rug should not be smaller than the length and width of the sofa or dining table. Sometimes, of course, the room itself can cause problems of proportion, in which case the best advice is to buy the biggest rug you can, given the restrictions you have.

The best solution of all, obviously, is to have a rug made to measure. That way you will get a tailor-made rug that is an exact fit for your furniture.

Kitchen and Dining Room

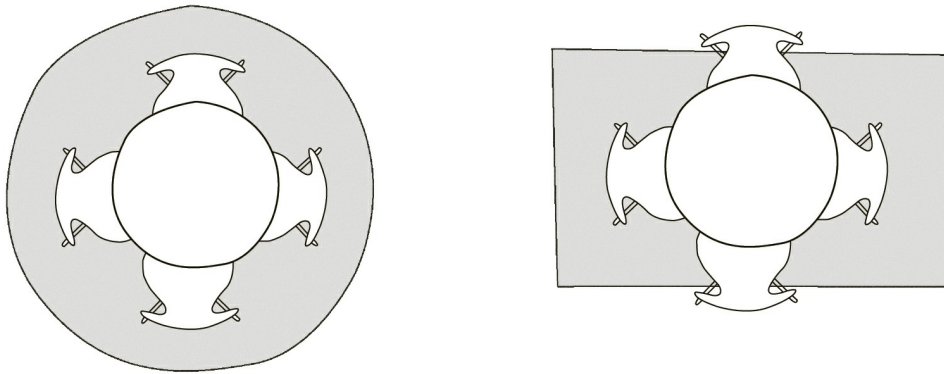
Ideally speaking, there should be room on the rug for the dining table and all its chairs, not only when they are pushed in, but also when they are pulled out for the diners. The usual measurement is that the rug needs to be 24 to 28 inches (60 to 70 cm) bigger than the tabletop, but it's always best to measure the chairs or to test that all four legs will still be on the rug when the chairs are pulled out.

Rectangular Tables

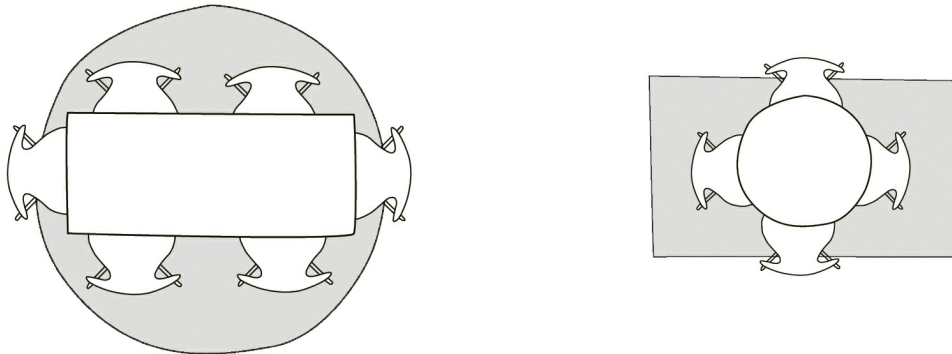


If you skimp with the size of the rug, the dining table and chairs will overlap the rug and the chair legs will be out of balance and wobble. There is also a risk that the legs of the chairs will catch in the edge of the rug once you sit down and are trying to slide the chair closer to the table.

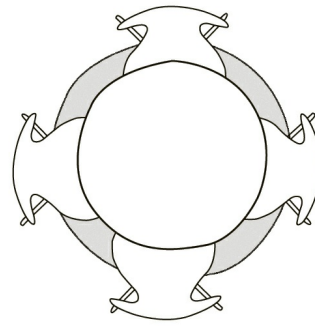
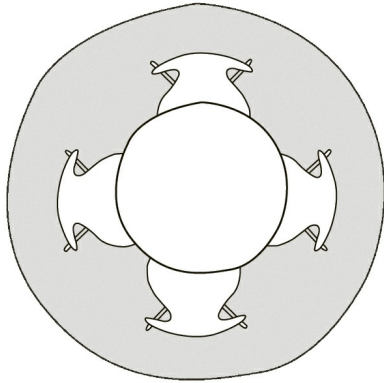
Rugs and Dining Tables



Think about the radial balance. Round tables are usually best on round rugs.



In general, avoid the combination of rectangular tables and round rugs and, likewise, rectangular rugs and round tables.



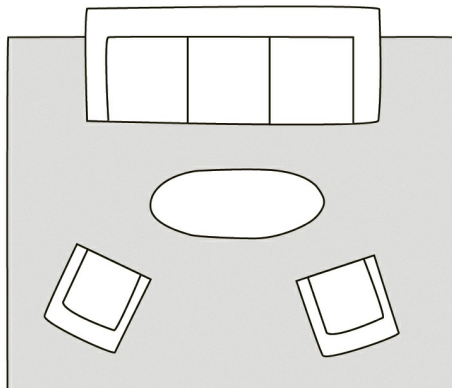
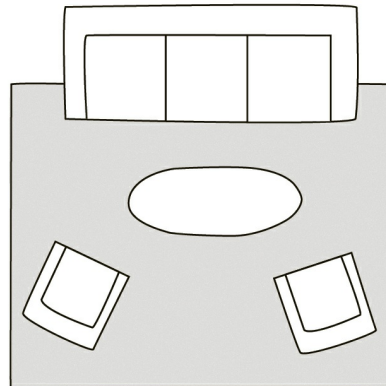
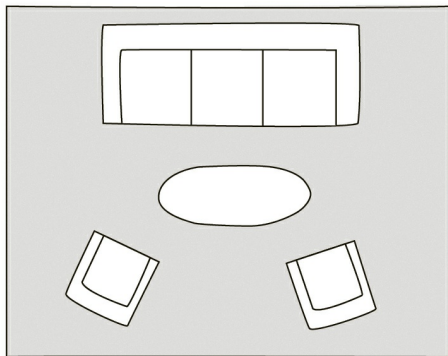
Add 24 to 28 inches (60 to 70 cm) all around the tabletop to allow space for pulled-out chairs to remain on the rug.



When working out the size of your rug, don't forget to make allowances for any doors (to other rooms, cupboards, or cabinets) that open into the room. If you are thinking of a thick rug, you may find that its pile gets in the way of doors.

Living Rooms

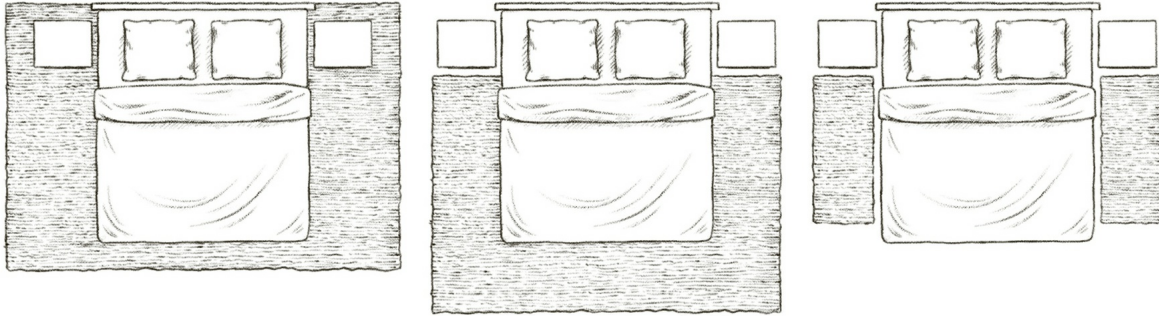
It is usually a case of working with the living room set you already have and letting that determine the size of the rug. The usual recommendation is that the rug should not be shorter than the length of the sofa, the idea being that it will not act as a foundation for the furniture if it is smaller than that. Ideally speaking, a rug should protrude all round. If your furniture is in the middle of the room, the rug should have space for all of it; if your sofa has its back to a wall, then its front legs standing on the rug will be sufficient.



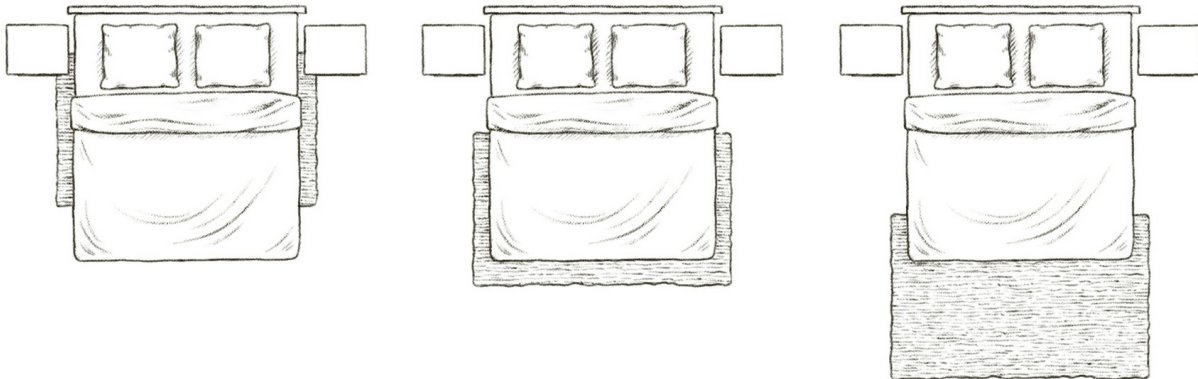
You should have either one-third of the living room set on the rug (e.g., the front legs of the sofa) or two-thirds of the sofa (i.e., the back legs) sticking out beyond the rug.

Bedrooms

Choose a rug that is in proportion with the room and the bed. If you have a large bedroom with plenty of space around the sides of the bed, you may want to buy a very large rug as a foundation. But it is worth thinking about the rule of thirds and remembering that people often like rugs that are in proportion to the width of the bed. When trying to determine harmonious proportions for a rug in smaller bedrooms, more attention is paid to the size of the whole room and other pieces of furniture than to the size of the bed.



Stylists usually recommend having either a large rug that extends 24 to 28 inches (60 to 70 cm) out on each side of the bed and takes in or excludes the bedside tables, or two shorter rugs, one on each side of the bed. This allows you the recommended amount of free space around the bed but saves you from stepping out onto a cold floor in the morning. This arrangement also provides the large bed with some visual anchoring. Avoid choosing a rug that disappears under the bed or one that just peeps out at the foot of the bed.



A good way to test different sizes of rugs and furniture is to use masking tape or painter's tape to mark out the shapes and sizes on the floor.

Halls

Halls are frequently the most heavily trafficked part of the house, so it is important to choose a rug of hard-wearing quality. Since halls are often quite constricted and include several doors, I usually recommend long, narrow, smooth rugs that don't add much height and don't collect dirt and grit. A good practical idea is to choose a rug that is reversible, as stains can appear all too easily. Avoid rugs with fringes, as the fringes will wear out quickly given the daily traffic—better to have a rug with bound edges.

Bathrooms

The most suitable rug size for your bathroom will depend on the size and shape of the room and where the bathroom fixtures are placed. Since the recommended free passageway in a bathroom is 28 inches (70 cm), standard rugs are based on that measurement. Think of the proportions of the room as a whole when you are buying your rug, and if you can't make up your mind, I suggest you simply put a rug in front of the sink, since that is where you stand most of the time.

 **Beautiful rugs give character to boring floors."**

—Elsa Billgren

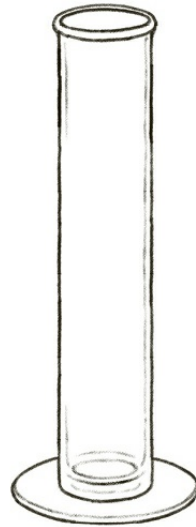
More About Rugs

- Having rugs cut and edged is a good way to get a professionally finished solution to the size and shape of rug you want. Old rugs, as well as new rugs, can be cut and edged.
- If you have fallen in love with a hooked rug that is just a little too small for what you want, buy two and tape them together on the underside with gaffer tape. Or put a nonslip pad under them so that they stay together.
- Hand-knotted rugs will change their appearance depending on whether the direction of the pile is running toward the window or away from it. If you are not pleased with the color, turn the rug around 180 degrees!
- If your rug has developed ugly, flattened patches, dampen a towel with lukewarm water and dab the pile where it has been trampled. Or use a steamer on it. You can also carefully brush the surface with a sparse-bristle brush.
- Sunlight and foot traffic can affect the appearance of a rug. Turn and move your rugs every year to even out wear and fading.
- Rugs can create sunspots on wooden floors by blocking the daylight and preventing the floor from darkening evenly. When opportunity arises, roll up the rugs or fold them back to allow the floor under the rugs to get its share of sunlight.
- You should avoid hand-tufted rugs if you have heated floors, as there is a possibility the heating cables will soften the glue in the rug and loosen the tufts!
- Remember contrasting effects. Lighter rugs will accentuate dark furniture and vice versa.
- Keep thin rugs in place with a nonslip rug pad.

Make a Collection of Vases

How many (and what kind of) vases do you need in your house?

The natural starting point is to think about the cut flowers you like best and bring home most often. But I do think it is important to give some thought to the most common types of bouquets people might bring to a birthday celebration or a dinner party—it's sad to have to put a pretty bouquet in an unflattering vase.



Slim cylinder vase with base



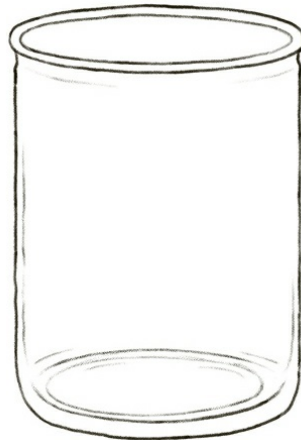
V-shaped vase



Waisted vase



Bulb vase



Cylinder vase

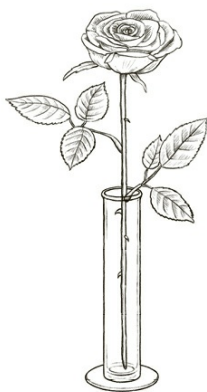


Globe vase

So, thinking of the shape, height, width, and water requirements of the most common types of bouquet, look through your cupboard and decide what vases you need to add.

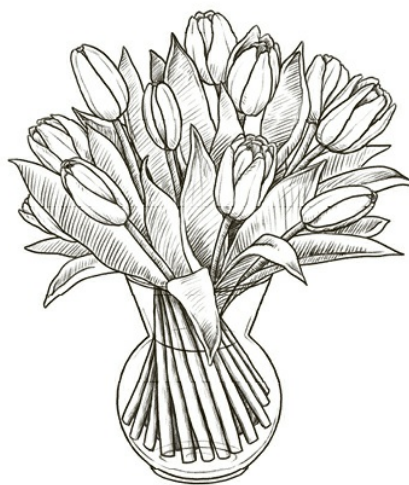
A Solitary Cut Flower

Single flowers need slim vases that can support a solitary stem without it collapsing or bending.



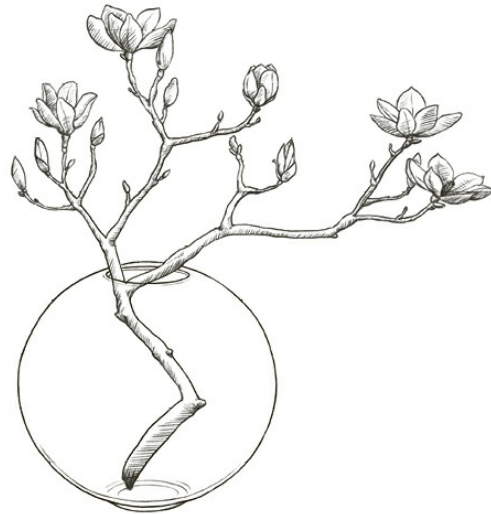
Classic Bouquets and Maxi Bouquets

Classic, hand-tied bouquets and modern, more bushy maxi bouquets need a vase that supports the stems at the same time as allowing the leaves to spread at the top.



Long-Stemmed Cut Flowers and Twigs

Tall cut flowers with long stems, such as roses or lilies, call for a vase that is slightly V-shaped and heavy enough to be stable and unlikely to tip over. Long twigs such as cherry and magnolia need a vase with a narrow neck that helps to hold the shape.



Bulbs

Bulbs that do need special moisture call for special hyacinth or amaryllis vases with an hourglass shape that keeps the roots in the water (but the stems and leaves out of the water).



Privacy

Many modern houses have picture windows and glass from floor to ceiling, but they are also very close to other houses. A lack of privacy from the street or from neighbors is thus a common problem in new developments. As well as having curtains and blinds, there are other clever ways around the problem. If you have your own garden, there is always the possibility of taking outdoor measures to prevent people from looking in—and that gives a much greater sense of privacy indoors.

Window Privacy

- Sheer curtains that let in the light but prevent people from looking in
- Roman blinds
- Pleated blinds (can work from the bottom and the top)
- Vertical blinds
- Venetian blinds
- Wooden venetian blinds
- Café curtains
- Plastic window film
- Shutters
- Freestanding screens on the windowsill, such as paper or plastic folding screens

- Window shelves. It used to be common to fit an upper window shelf in the window—it should be possible to do this in windows where the lack of privacy is a problem.

A Lighting Solution

A lamp standing on the windowsill, a pendant lamp in the window, or inset spotlights all cut down the view from outside: the cone of light on the windowsill means there is less focus on the lighted room.

Large Plants on the Floor

If you have large windows without windowsills, good-size plants and indoor trees with big leaves will let the light in while providing some privacy. If your house has picture windows, you will need groups of sizable plants, a plant table, or a plant ladder in order to set plants at different heights.

Climbing Plants and Plant Curtains

Houseplants that climb upward can offer a degree of privacy in kitchen or bathroom windows: ivy, devil's ivy, wax plant, and satin pothos all work well. Some of the classic trailing plants in hanging baskets—jasmine, for instance—also make good plant curtains.

Still Life on the Windowsill

Piles of books and decorative objects on the windowsill, along with lamps and houseplants, help screen out intrusive eyes.

Fabric-Covered Frames

Picture frames with fabric (lace, perhaps) stretched across them make mobile screens that you can lean or hang across a window when you want.

Furniture

Light and airy pieces of furniture close to a picture window give some protection without cutting out light. Good items for this purpose are glass serving carts or low sideboards that are attractive from the back as well as the front.

Outdoor Screening

- Bushes, hedges, trees, and foliage in general
- Fences and railings
- Stone walls
- Screen panels and trellises
- Wicker or bamboo screens
- Flower boxes at different heights

Hide-and-Seek with the TV and Technology

Technology is developing and being refined from one day to the next, but many people still find television sets or their partner's loudspeakers, subwoofers, surround-sound systems, and all of the requisite wiring maddening. Assuming that we can't live without these things, how do we design our way around the problem?

Here are a few hints on playing hide-and-peek with these technological toys.

Cable Camouflage

By far the best way of dealing with cables is to run them inside the walls. If that's not possible, the next best thing is to use hollow moldings, which can be bought by the yard and painted to match the room's color scheme. But if there is no way of hiding the cables, you will have to try to find cable as near the color of the wall or carpet as possible. On light-color walls, use white cable if you can, and do the opposite on dark walls. Don't allow the cable to hang down: stretch it and fix it at regular intervals with cable clips, then hide any excess so that there aren't skeins of it lying on the carpet. You will eventually stop seeing it, but it's a nuisance when you are cleaning, and it never looks neat.

A Wall of Pictures to Hide the TV

Television sets are black when they are off, and they tend to look like a large black hole in the wall, particularly when standing all alone in the middle of a TV console. Hanging a wall full of pictures of different kinds around the TV will help camouflage it.

Minimize the Contrast with the Color of the Wall

Another way of camouflaging the black hole of the TV or those big black speakers and surround-sound systems is to paint the wall a darker color. The smaller the contrast, the less those annoying bits of technology will show.

TV Consoles and Bookshelves

There are ready-made media units on the market, in which the TV is integrated or lowered out of sight when not in use. But you may feel up to a DIY project instead: You can build the technological bits and pieces into a bookcase or cupboard so that they are out of sight when you don't want to look at them. Remember that the TV screen will need to be brought forward a little and line up with the front edge of its cabinet so that everyone sitting in front of the TV can watch it without the doors blocking the view. You also need to make sure that the whole thing is anchored to the wall and cannot tip forward—and that there is no risk of the equipment heating up enough to cause a fire. I've also seen the problem solved with a purpose-built slim TV cabinet, the doors painted the same color as the wall. It

was almost invisible.

Curtains

Then there is the old cinema method! Hide everything behind a curtain when it's not in use. All you need is a ceiling-mounted rail and some curtains.

Updating the Kitchen and Bathroom Without Demolition and Renovation

What do you do if you want to make visual changes to your bathroom or kitchen without bringing in someone to knock things down and rebuild them? You just want a light, superficial makeover!

Here are a few of my best tips for making changes in rooms in which the fittings are fixed. They will work whether the property is rented or owned, but if it is rented, you must always get the landlord's approval first.

Light-Touch Kitchen Makeover

There are several shortcuts available to update the kitchen without making substantial changes.

- Unscrew the cupboard doors and take them in for revarnishing. Or paint them by hand using a good roller and woodwork paint.
- Change all the handles and latches. You can sell the old ones yourself or through a secondhand shop.
- Change the ceiling lighting. Take out the ordinary ceiling lights or strip lighting that is the norm in modern housing and replace them with track lighting that you can aim anywhere you want light.
- Cover patterned or colored tiles with special tile stickers. It can be a bit fiddly to do properly, but it will last a long time and give the whole kitchen a lift. If you can't bear the thought of gluing on decals, you might prefer painting the tiles with a roller, undercoat, and special tile paint. Ask your paint store for advice.
- If there is no chance of painting the kitchen cupboards, what about repainting one wall? It's a very undervalued way of making a change, even if you aren't keen on strong colors. A mild change of shade can make the cupboard doors and the whole kitchen feel completely different.
- Buy rugs to conceal damaged floors—runners usually work out cheaper than large rugs and are just as effective. Or if you put a long tablecloth on the table, no one will notice the floor surface under it.
- Shelves and open shelving offer another way of making changes in the kitchen. If you are in a rented property, you could remove cupboard doors and use the shelves as open shelving. If you own the house, you are, of course, free to drill the tiles, so you can take down wall cupboards and put up open-shelf units on brackets.

Light-Touch Bathroom Makeover

- I haven't yet come across a bathroom that isn't improved by a bigger mirror over the sink. It's a cheap way of creating more space in a sad bathroom.
- New lighting. When dealing with lighting in the bathroom, it's important to know the current health and safety regulations for electricity in the tub and shower area. But it is relatively simple to change the lighting on the ceiling, and that can make an enormous difference to the room.
- Many people in rented accommodation are stuck with colored flooring and matching edging on the tilework that they dislike. If you find the accent color annoying, you can use tile decals (see [this page](#))—they work in tub and shower areas, too. And buy a big single-color rag rug to cover the floor and tone down the color.
- Rented property sometimes lacks cupboards and vanities. These things don't have to be fixed to the wall, but you will need the help of a plumber to move the piping. Store the old pieces and replace them if you move.
- It's usually possible to replace hooks without making new holes in the wall. Take out the old hooks and put new ones back in the same place.
- If you can't change the toilet, you can at least invest in a more elegant seat than the plastic ring that is standard in most modern housing. There are many colors, but you can also buy them in wood or wood-like materials if you prefer.
- Create more storage. Bring in a small shelf unit to provide more storage—assuming there is space for it. Put up open shelving on the unit behind the toilet. Use the back of the door for hooks on which to hang bath towels and robes, or put up a hook rack instead of hooks, using the holes already drilled in the tiles.



Is the grout discolored and ugly? The old grouting in bathrooms and showers can quickly and easily be freshened up with a grout pen. Choose a pen in which the color is mold-proof, water-based, and nontoxic. Before starting on the whole bathroom, it's sensible to test the pen somewhere not too obvious (behind the toilet, for instance) to make sure the color is right.

Designing for Children

The arrival of children usually causes major changes for the home as well as the family. Even if you want to retain your interiors as they are and are unwilling to compromise (a not unusual attitude among parents who have a strong interest in interior design), the end result is almost always that some adjustments are unavoidable. They may not be immediate but are inevitable once the child can crawl and begins to walk. As your daily life and requirements change, you have to consider practical and, indeed, safety issues. On top of which, there is another challenge—the design of the nursery.

A Room in a Constant State of Change

The first thing to say is that nothing remains constant when you have a growing child. Just as routines change at each new stage of development, needs and desires also change. You might as well reconcile yourself to a child's room needing to be changed several times as the child grows. And you should not only be thinking about what you want the room to look like; think about the kind of childhood memories you want to give your child. In my own case, I found it very helpful to remember the preferences and recall memories of the room I had as a child. What details and what colors did I still remember, and what were the things I was jealous of in my friends' rooms? Unexpectedly, perhaps, there is much to be gained from our memories, and they act as a complement to those stylish pictures of modern children's rooms we see in magazines and on social media.

Down on Your Knees!

Work from a child's perspective when designing a child's room and ensure that shelves, cupboards, and furniture are at a height suitable for their eyes. Getting down on your knees while designing is a simple way of recognizing how different the child's perspective is.

Choose Focal Points

It's easy to get hung up on practical details—finding places for all those small Lego bricks and toys and books—but don't forget to decide consciously about the focal points, even in a child's room. Three easy changes can make an enormous difference:

1. Use patterned wallpaper or a painted feature wall.
2. Invest in a nice big rug for the floor, and it can change the feel of the room completely. (It will also be nice for adults to sit on when playing games on the floor.)
3. Hang a lovely fixture on the ceiling as an immediate eye-catcher.

Make Room for Adults

One of the things you don't think about until you have children of your own (read: until you've suffered a cricked neck from hours lying on the floor getting children to sleep or reading them stories) is to make room for adults, even in the smallest children's rooms. Many children don't want to play by themselves, so a comfortable armchair for a parent or bigger brother or sister to sit in during the day, evening, or night is not a bad idea. And if the child likes snuggling up close to you while going to sleep, it may be worth buying a wider bed to avoid being too squashed and to get a better night's sleep.

Not Too Much Furniture

Unlike the rest of the house, it can be advantageous in a child's room to place the furniture around the walls in order to leave room to play on the floor. Make sure there is physical space and opportunity for children to use their own imaginations, and don't forget to consider interior rhythm even in a child's room. Have you provided clear spaces, or is the room too full? Be careful not to overfurnish, and think about flexible solutions that can be adapted according to the child's age and play needs.

Nooks and Hideaways

A child's room should be as cozy as possible. Create a snug little hideaway in the corner of the room, with pillows, cushions, and soft bits and pieces, in which the child can play quietly, read, or just rest.

Tidiness

Help the child keep things tidy by providing lots of good drawers—at child level—to store toys, games, and Legos. If you don't, the child will always rely on you to keep the room tidy.

Design Cheats for Parents

- Use the tray trick! Don't deprive your home of everything nice because you have children. Just move things to a safer place—that is, out of reach—when they are very small or when they are up and about during the day. Until our first child was three, I kept the coffee table setup (a couple of candlesticks, some small porcelain vases, a pewter matchbox, and some nibbles) on a tray so that I could move them away quickly and then put them back in the evening when our son was asleep.
- Make things easy for yourself by thinking about storage—and not just in the child's room. Put baskets for toys in all the rooms the child uses—they don't need to be childish baskets. The "basket" in the kitchen, for instance, could be an empty kitchen drawer at child level, and in the living room it might be a footstool with a storage compartment.
- Invest in furniture with removable covers that are machine washable. If that is not possible, buy a throw of the same or similar color and throw it over the sofa when protection is needed.
- Choose rugs that will hide stains.
- Sticky lint rollers are perfect for picking up small beads, glitter, and hobby materials from tablecloths, rugs, pillows, and other places.
- Protect the rug under the kitchen table from spills and dropped food with a transparent floor protector designed for office chairs. They are usually cheaper to buy (and bigger versions are available) in office supply stores than in baby and nursery shops.
- Wet wipes are good for removing ink marks from painted furniture and walls. Liquid dish soap and window-cleaning spray will deal with many issues.
- Put a thin stocking over the nozzle of the vacuum cleaner and use it to pick up Lego bricks that have fallen into awkward places, down between cushions, or in the pile of the rug.



Think Before You Buy

Can you tell the difference between lasting love and transient passion when it comes to interiors? How do you avoid bad buys and invest only in things that will stand the test of time?

I've made my share of mistakes over the years, but I've also learned some of the ways of sorting the good from the bad and recognizing the things that, in the long run, are likely to prove expensive rather than cheap.

In this chapter I will suggest some of my own strategies, along with smart tips I've picked up from other people.

Investment Strategies for Interiors Enthusiasts

What will still seem fresh to your eyes with the passing of time is clearly a very individual issue, but I think you'll be in a much better position to create something you remain in love with if you consider the following points before handing over your money. And your chances of making a sounder investment will be all the greater.

Fit and Comfort

Clothing truly comes into its own only when it is designed for the body type of the wearer. So say people in the fashion world. Whatever the fashion or current trend, most people don't want to walk around in shoes that are several sizes too big, and it's difficult to feel comfortable in a bra that cuts into your back. But things are not always that clear-cut in the world of interiors. I have a feeling that we are quite likely to close our eyes and suspend our better judgment as to what's best for our situation, and to choose things because they are trendy, smart, cool, neat, cheap, or, even worse, because ignoring all concerns as to whether they are too big, too small, too tight, too long, or too expensive makes us feel free and splendidly unconcerned.

Paying attention to the fit and comfort of your home can save you from short-term love affairs and from any number of bad buys. What goes best with the size and character of the room? Which materials are most practical given the way the furniture will be used?

Classics

Furniture and interiors accessories we think of as classic were thought of as new and pioneering in their day. Classics, unlike passing trends, have survived and become iconic, even though their days of greatness may be in the past and the context has changed. The common feature shared, in my view, by many lasting classics is a level of originality—that is to say, their construction or form reveals something unique in design and quality.

If you are finding it difficult to navigate your way around contemporary furniture and to predict what will last, you might want to play it safe and buy furniture from an earlier period. That way you can read more about quality, and you have a chance to assess secondhand values.

Quality

The mass-produced laminate cabinets of today and the furniture made of thinly veneered chipboard are very unlikely to be the antiques of tomorrow, if for no other reason than they lack the solid construction that makes it possible to repair them. Damage and cracks are difficult to deal with since the surface can't be rubbed down. And many of the most fashionable items of furniture are sold only for a limited period, which makes it impossible to buy spare parts that might increase their life span when they start wearing out.

Buying solid wood furniture made by craftsmen is a way of turning your interior design into an investment, since its secondhand value is usually higher than that of mediocre, semifinished furniture.

What should you look for if you want quality furniture that will last longer? Here are some guidelines worth following, both for new products and for older, used items.

Choose	Instead of	Because
Solid wood	Veneer, MDF, chipboard	Easier to repair and develops nice patina with age
European wood, FSC certified	Tropical wood	Naturally suited to northern climate and moisture. Sustainable forestry. Traceable source.
CITES-approved timber	Noncertified and endangered species (e.g., palisander)	Illegal without CITES certification
Oiled, soaped, or waxed surfaces	Varnish	Water resistant, allows wood to breathe. A dent or nick can be repaired by sanding.
Natural or ecological colors	Paint	Fewer chemicals, more attractive sheen, more environmentally friendly
Vegetable-tanned leather	Chrome-tanned leather	Fewer toxic chemicals
Washable loose covers	Nonremovable covers	Easier to clean and maintain, longer lasting
Ecological textiles (e.g., linen, cotton, wool)	Synthetic materials and plastics	More sustainable, fewer chemicals involved in the production, no microplastics that can pass into the environment
Tencel or recycled polyester	Virgin/nonrecycled synthetics	Lower carbon dioxide emissions

CPU (Cost per Use)

Buying cheap furniture and accessories may seem economical at the time but can prove very expensive in the long run. The home investment strategy I have adopted is to look beyond the immediate cost or the price label on a design classic and to estimate for myself the CPU—cost per use—of an item over its likely life span. If you spread the purchase price over the number of years that a high-quality, craftsman-built design classic is likely to remain in use, you will see that it is rare for a lower cost, mass-produced item to be cheaper in the long run: the latter cannot usually be repaired and is likely to be trendy and lack any meaningful secondhand value, and its disposal may well cost you when you eventually take it to the garbage dump.

It's important to choose varieties of wood that work in our climate. Significant differences in terms of temperature and humidity between the natural climate of the wood and the indoor climate you will place it in can lead to dried and cracking wood.

Taking It with You

During our lifetimes, we usually move several times, and our tastes tend to change along the way, so it's worth giving some thought to which pieces of furniture and interiors accessories we will invest in and which can wait. Only you can make that decision, and gut feeling is a vital element in any successful purchase, but, initially anyway, a good general rule of thumb is to spend most of your money on things you can take with you—things that are not dependent on the size and shape of your current home. Most of the things that aren't permanently screwed to the wall and will fit into the trunk of your car are worth spending some money on, items such as artwork, designer lamps, candlesticks, classic vases, china, cutlery, and chairs. These are things that can remain with you throughout your design life, from your student room to your retirement apartment.

Flea Market Wish Lists

There are plenty of flea markets to explore, as well as online auctions and marketplaces. I really like exploring them, but I have a tendency to glaze over when faced with a room full of things or a blank search screen on an auction site. But now I've adopted the technique used by hardened flea market enthusiasts—I keep a wish list on my cell phone of secondhand items I should keep an eye open for whenever the chance arises.

A trick I learned from the Swedish fashion blogger Elsa Billgren is to look for secondhand bargains by entering a keyword as a starter—it might be the name of a special boutique or a celebrity or a particular period you like. Working the secondhand market calls for a slightly different mindset compared with strolling around shops that have seemingly endless rows of the same or similar items. The more you practice, the better you get, and with your wish list or cell phone in hand, you will begin to find it easier to navigate your way to the treasures you seek!

Vintage Value

If your aim is to buy older furniture, interior accessories, or lithographs as an investment, there are a couple of points to watch for, as they can have an effect on the value of vintage items.

Provenance

The fact that a vintage object has a context or has been owned by a particular individual potentially means that its value increases. Some auction houses run sales when stately homes are being renovated or demolished, and it may be that parts of the estate of well-known figures are being auctioned off. If you buy anything, it is vital that you keep any documentation that proves its provenance, as that will be vital if you later decide to sell.

Patina

The way the passage of time has aged a piece of furniture or object can increase its value, particularly if the wear and tear is not the kind that can be produced mechanically or artificially. This is what's called patina, and auction catalogs often refer to it.

Prototypes

Some furniture makers, artists, and ceramicists prefer to produce their sketches in three-dimensional form before going into production. It's possible, with a little luck, to get hold of a preproduction model of a well-known item of furniture or even a unique prototype that never went into production. These can be difficult to acquire, and that will affect their price, both current and future.

Special and Limited Editions

Limited lines, produced, for instance, in connection with a jubilee or celebration, are referred to as special or limited editions. They tend to become desirable items for collectors after a while, and that is reflected in their value, irrespective of whether they were produced for exclusive outlets or for one of IKEA's occasional collections.

Numbering

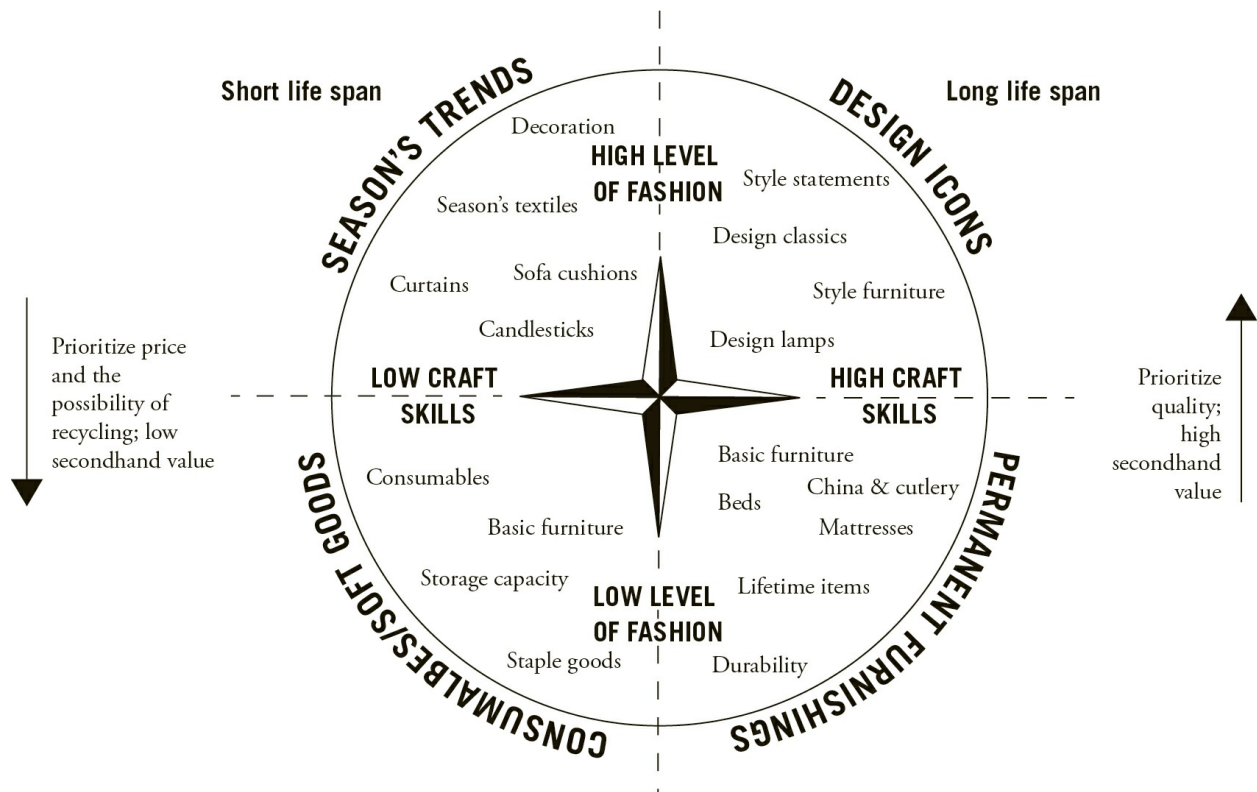
When buying lithographs or art prints, it is important to look at the numbering. The size of the edition usually affects how much the value will increase in the long term—a small edition means a higher value—but which number in the series you buy is important: the lower the number, the better.

“The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten.”

–Benjamin Franklin

Priorities: My Principle

Over the years, I've developed a principle of my own to remind me of the priorities when deciding on purchases for the home. This is how I go about considering different kinds of products:



High Level of Fashion + Low Craft Skills = Short Life Span

Most of the things referred to as this spring's or this winter's color, material, or IT gizmo can be categorized as seasonal trends. They are usually mass-produced in very large numbers and using cheap materials, which means they are of lower quality, lack in rarity value, and have a shorter life span and lower secondhand value. I avoid buying larger items of furniture with these characteristics, but I will go for smaller accessories in recyclable materials or from the secondhand market. If old-style brass candlesticks are trendy, there are genuinely old ones on the market, and they are preferable to new ones that have been factory-treated to give them a patina.

High Level of Fashion + High Craft Skills = Greater Likelihood of Long Life Span

Furniture and interiors accessories that are both fashionable and of high quality are likely to outlive their own era, have a good secondhand value, and might even become a design icon. This is where I would place products made of materials with a naturally long life span or guaranteed historical value, such as solid metals (e.g., brass and copper) or hand-blown glass.

Low Level of Fashion + Low Craft Skills = Short Life Span

In this category, I would place those things that have an anonymous existence in our homes or things that need changing at regular intervals—disposable items such as storage containers, doormats, boxes, and candles. Here I prioritize items that are made of environmentally friendly and recyclable materials, and those on which there is a repayable deposit.

Low Level of Fashion + High Craft Skills = Greater Likelihood of Long Life Span

In this category, I would place things that may play a rather hidden role in any home but are likely to be with us for a long time: the bed, the mattress, the everyday china, and cutlery. Levels of fashion are much less important—the main thing being that we don't want to get sick of the sight of the particular pieces of furniture or accessories since they are with us for a lifetime. And given a high level of craft skill and good quality, these items often have a good secondhand value, which is why I

am always very careful when I evaluate them. Even something as personal as a bed can have an acceptable secondhand value as long as you invested in a quality handmade bed rather than a mass-produced one.



Key Measurements and Proportions

It's wonderful, of course, to bring feeling and enthusiasm to the process of designing your home, but it is equally important to take space and ergonomics into account so that you don't end up crashing into things day in and day out. In this section I have brought together, room by room, some recommendations and key measurements that are worth knowing.

Ergonomics in the Home

Sweden has been a pioneer in researching the ergonomics of the home. The Home Research Institute, financed by the state, was founded during the 1940s to carry out both wide-reaching research and consumer education with the aim of developing good housing standards. Among its other activities, it measured and analyzed kitchen work in Swedish homes and made proposals regarding standardization and norms to improve the ergonomics and working conditions of housework. In 1957 the institute was reorganized as the National Institute for Consumer Affairs, which today is known as the Consumer Affairs Office.

In terms of women's equality, we have come a long way since the 1940s. In those days many Swedish women were housewives who, from an ergonomic point of view, were often working in home conditions that were far from ideal. The knowledge and information gathered at that time, and the building norms that developed from the recognition that the home was also a place of work, have made today's home environment much better. Our homes are now safer and better adapted to the activities we need to carry out in them, even though it is no longer common for one person to have full-time responsibility there.

Some of the measurements given in the following section are building norms, others are more general guidelines, and some are simply useful advice. It is not a case of you having to run around with a ruler and design your interior with millimeter precision. Just as with fashion, even though something is considered to be right, there can still be variation. But by making sure there is room for us to move around and swing the proverbial cat, we'll be sparing ourselves a great deal of everyday irritation. The measurements are recommendations worth knowing when you are planning, changing, or installing something in your home and don't have an instinctive sense of where or how high to place it.

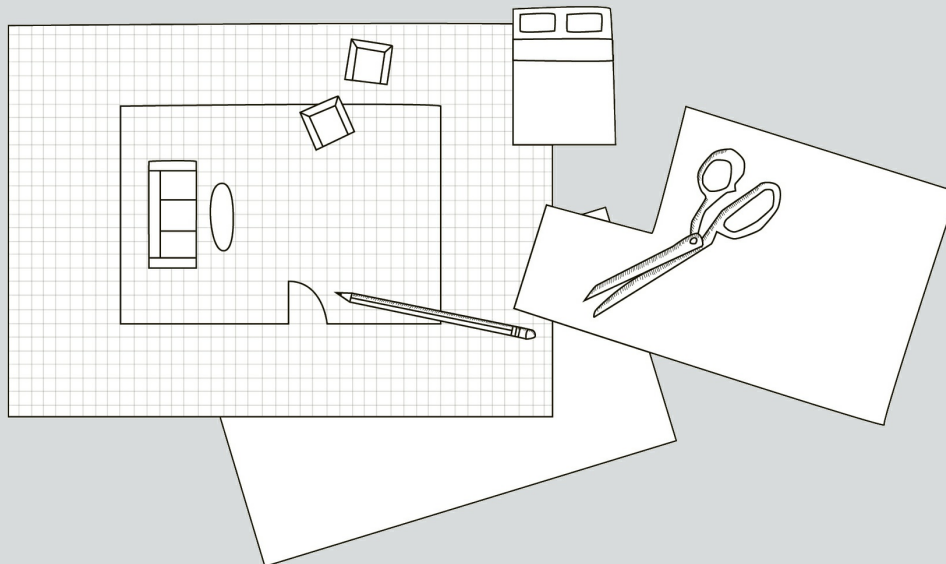


If you are looking for more details about building materials and standards for residents, check *Neufert Architects' Data* (5th ed.) by Ernst Neufert (Wiley Blackwell, 2019).

Make a Cutout of Your Floor Plan

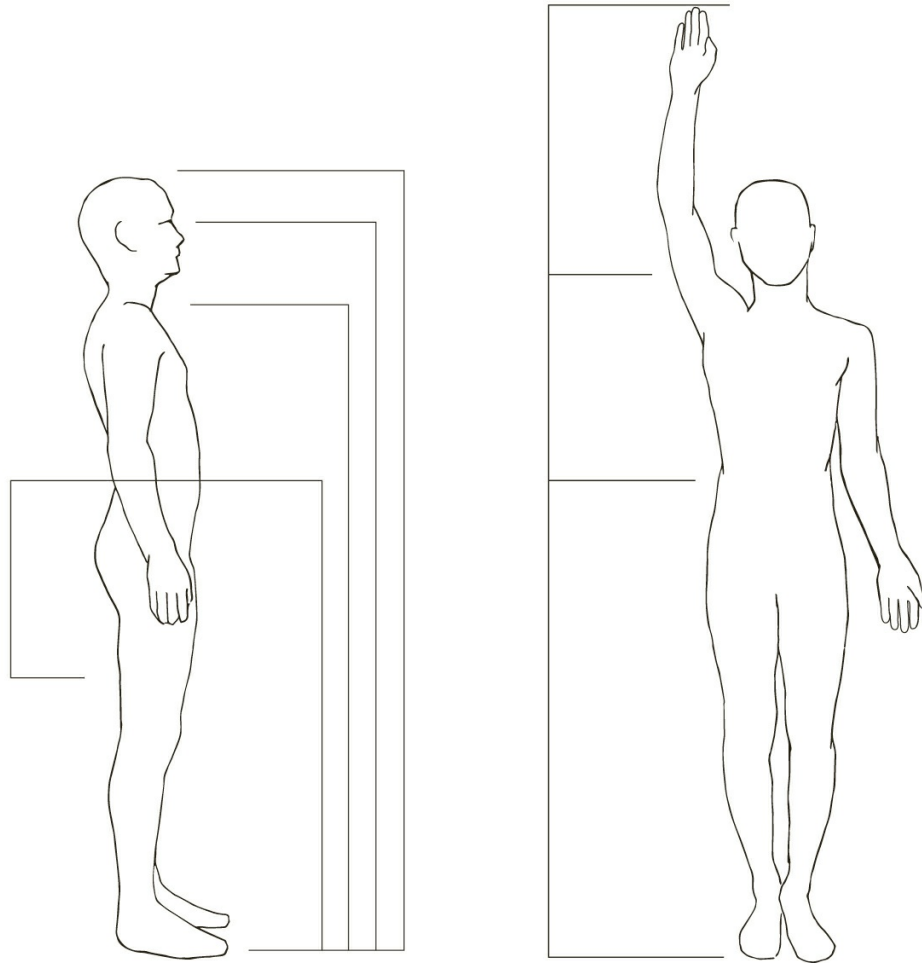
There are numerous digital tools available now to enable you to sketch your plans and try various alternative interiors before you move, renovate, or build. You might, however, prefer to work with a pencil and paper. Make a copy of the floor plan of your home at a scale of 1:100—this is the scale most commonly used by housebuilders and real estate agents (see below). Using the same scale, cut out paper shapes of your furniture and interiors accessories. These can easily be moved around the floor plan to test different arrangements and to give you some idea of which areas might be constricted and the dimensions of furniture most suited to your home.

The scale 1:100 means that 1 centimeter on paper represents 1 meter in the real world. The squares on squared paper are usually 0.5 centimeter.



You might take a different view of these recommendations and, perhaps, of standardized recommendations in general. Some people think it's foolish to talk about

common practice and guidelines in the case of something as private as your own home—others, however, welcome the guidance. I find it interesting that we seem to have much greater respect for the importance of ergonomics in the workplace than in our homes, where we spend more time than at work.



Anthropometrics is the study of human body measurements. It is used mainly to provide standard norms, but it is also an important source for the designers of furniture and interiors when they are creating environments that are both functional and comfortable.

In anthropometrics, for instance, leg length and arm width are used to estimate reach, distance, and the amount of space needed. The fact that there is professional expertise and standardized sizing based on different body shapes seems self-evident in the case of clothes, but it is equally important in interior design—if, that is, we are serious about creating functional homes that work for both short and tall people.



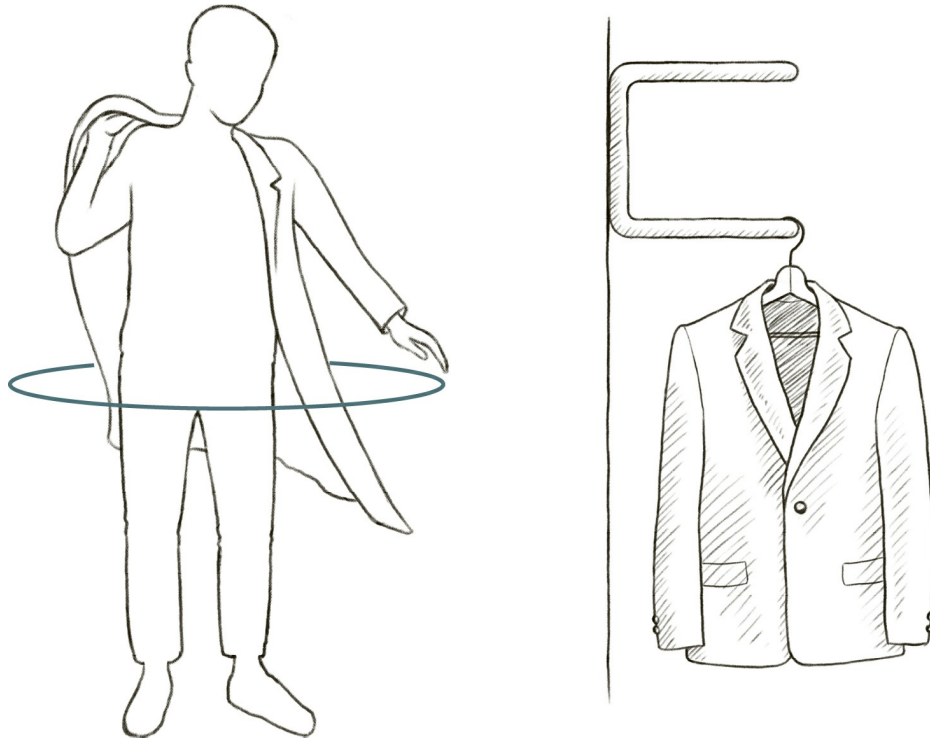
When planning an interior, don't forget to take account of the space taken up by furniture, such as freestanding closets or wardrobes, cupboards, and bureaus when all the doors are open and the drawers pulled out. Failure to do so may mean there is insufficient space to open doors and drawers without having to move some other item—and that can be annoying. Work out in advance how much space you need to leave in front of furniture of this kind to allow both free passage for people and the positioning of other items.

Halls

Halls, lobbies, foyers—there are many names, and they come in many shapes and sizes, but whichever name they go by, they are the first part of the home we meet as we enter. I read somewhere that “the hall is the gateway between the home and the outer world,” and if that is so, it's vital that it should not be a bottleneck. Is the shelf for hats at the right height? Are the hangers for outdoor clothes of the right size? How much space do you need to leave for your shoes and your guests' shoes? Here are some useful tips.

- A shelf for hats should be about 71 inches (180 cm) from the floor.
- Remember to measure the length of the longest garment you own before you place a shoe rack or piece of furniture under the hat shelf. Long coats may need 55 to 63 inches (140 to 160 cm) of space between the hooks on the shelf and the shoe rack on the floor.

- Clothes hangers are normally 16 to 18 inches (40 to 45 cm) wide, and any clothes on them take a little more space. When you are taking a coat off a hanger, the hanger usually swings: you should allow a little extra space so that the hanger doesn't scrape the wall behind the shelf or coat rack.
- How much room will coats take up? A lined overcoat on a hanger on a coat rack will occupy about 4 inches (10 cm) of the length of the rack.
- You will need to allow about 12 to 14 inches (30 to 35 cm) of the shelf for each hat, cap, or cycle helmet.
- Full-size men's shoes require a shoe shelf at least 12½ inches (32 cm) deep.
- A good height for a low set of coat hooks is 37 to 39 inches (95 to 100 cm) from the floor.
- It is not accidental that coat closets are about 24 inches (60 cm) deep, that being the amount of space taken up by a garment hanging free. (The width of the hanger plus the garment is normally 22 inches / 55 cm.) In the case of closets with overlapping sliding doors, the total depth is likely to be 27 inches (68 cm).
- When designing the hall, it's important to leave plenty of room to put on coats and not to overfurnish the space. You can reckon an adult needs a circle roughly 36 inches (90 cm) in diameter to put on a coat.



Bathrooms

When renovating bathrooms, it's advisable to get the assistance of tradesmen, but it is still worth having some idea of the standard measurements when planning and purchasing fittings. At what height should you fix the rod for the shower curtain, for instance, and how high should the hooks for the towels be?

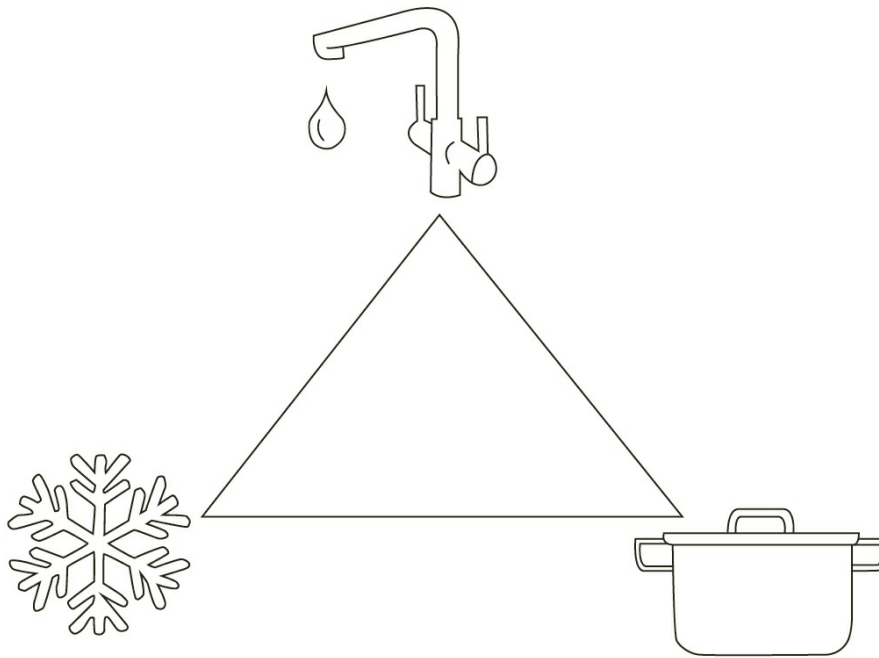
- The recommended space in a shower cubicle is 32 by 32 inches (80 by 80 cm).
- Depending on the height of the ceiling and the length of the shower curtain, the curtain rod is usually 78 to 86½ inches (200 to 220 cm) from the floor. That should be sufficient for an adult to enter the shower without ducking.
- The standard measurements of shower curtains are 71 by 78 inches (180 by 200 cm) or 72 by 72 inches (180 by 180 cm).
- A shower curtain that drags on the floor will quickly become unhygienic, and a curtain that is too far off the floor will offer less protection against splashing. When you are measuring the height for the shower curtain rod and the curtain itself, remember to allow for the eyelets or curtain hooks.
- The toilet roll holder is usually attached 26 to 28 inches (65 to 70 cm) above floor level.
- Hooks for smaller towels are usually 39 to 47 inches (100 to 120 cm) above the floor, whereas hooks for large bath towels are fixed a little higher—59 to 63 inches (150 to 160 cm)—so that they don't trail on the floor.
- With doors that open inward into the room, think about clearance: you don't want to place laundry hampers or pieces of furniture where they will constrict the space.
- Allow enough room in the front of chests of drawers and low cupboards so that there is space to open all the doors properly.
- It is recommended that the walking space in the bathroom should be at least 28 inches (70 cm) wide.

Kitchens

Over the years, kitchens have been the subject of numerous ergonomic and planning studies, and yet we still see many kitchens built that seem not to have followed the guidelines and knowledge we have gained. Fine to look at, perhaps, but hard work and hopelessly impractical, with the oven at one end and the sink at the other, so that you have to walk the length of the kitchen carrying a hot saucepan just to drain the pasta.

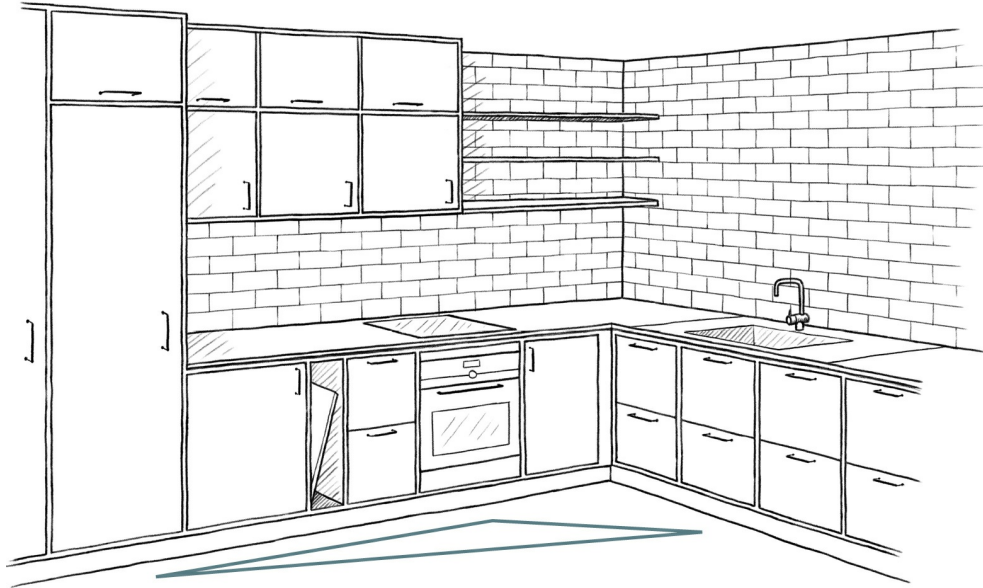
There are building norms and standards to guide us, but there are also general recommendations that can help when it comes to planning any major renovation work in the kitchen. The most important thing of all is the work triangle, by which we mean—to put it briefly—that the oven, the refrigerator, and the sink should be no more than a step and a half—a basketball step—from one another. These are the three points we move between most frequently when working in the kitchen, and they should not be too far apart.

A whole book could be devoted to kitchen planning, but in the following section, I'll give a few useful measurements that are worth having on hand before you start sketching out your plan. I do, however, recommend that you consult an expert before planning and undertaking any permanent fixtures in kitchens and bathrooms.



Work Surfaces

- The work surface between the sink and the oven should be between 32 and 47 inches (80 and 120 cm) wide. This is one of the most important kitchen measurements—anything less than this will feel too constricted to be practical.
- The standard depth of work surfaces is 24 inches (60 cm). If there is room, increase this to 28 inches (70 cm) to provide more space to work and put things down.
- The standard height of a work surface is 36 inches (90 cm). This is a comfortable level for a person of medium height to work at.
- Wall cupboards should be fixed at least 20 inches (50 cm) above the work surface in order to prevent hitting your head when preparing food.
- It is useful to have a surface to put things on beside the fridge/freezer and an eye-level oven. The work surface by the stovetop and oven should be heatproof, and it is good if the fridge door opens to a surface on which things can be put.
- Don't forget to allow elbow room for comfortable working. Don't position the oven right by a wall or tall cupboard: the usual recommendation is that there should be at least 8 inches (20 cm) of free space on each side of the cooker.



Passageways and Empty Spaces

- To have space to stand and open the doors of the oven and the dishwasher, you will need to allow a passageway at least 47 inches (120 cm) wide. Avoid positioning the dishwasher where people often pass: a door left open when loading or unloading the machine can cause someone to trip.
- A passageway 44½ inches (110 cm) wide is sufficient in front of ordinary cupboards and storage units.
- In kitchens with work surfaces opposite one another, the passageway between them should be at least 47 inches (120 cm); 55 inches (140 cm) is preferable, however, as it allows two people to work at the same time without colliding.

Other Measurements

- As a basic principle in the kitchen, there should be at least one double electrical outlet for every 59 inches (150 cm) of wall. The outlet for items such as coffee machines that are permanently plugged in, for instance, will be at the level of the work surface, whereas outlets for less frequently used appliances can be below the wall cupboards. And you must not forget outlets at floor level for the vacuum cleaner and at ceiling level and in the windows for lighting.

Eating

There are a number of key measurements you should bear in mind whether your dining table is in the kitchen or in a separate dining room. They will ensure that you can sit down and stand up easily and comfortably and also enjoy the food and the company undisturbed.

If you have padded dining chairs, the sitting height should be measured from the cushion when it is compressed (i.e., when someone is sitting on it). Very soft padding will compress a good way and will be lower than firm padding, so it is important to measure from the actual sitting position.

- The seat of a dining chair should measure 16 by 20 inches (40 by 50 cm) and it should be 16¼ to 18 inches (41 to 45 cm) from the floor.
- The surface of the dining table should be 28½ to 30 inches (72 to 75 cm) from the floor. The underframe and apron of the table should be at least 25 inches (63 cm) from the floor to allow the chairs and diners' legs to slide comfortably underneath.
- Do not take your measurements from the top surface of the table. If the table has a very thick tabletop or a deep apron, there is a risk of too little legroom and the table rubbing the diners' legs.
- There should be about 12 inches' (30 cm) difference in height between the seat of the chair and the surface of the table. The seat height of chairs can vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, so make sure you carefully measure all items before you buy tables and chairs from different companies. If you have inherited or are buying an older table, it is important to check the dimensions so you can choose chairs of the right size to go with it.
- A round dining table for four or five people needs a diameter of at least 44½ inches (110 cm); a table for six people needs at least 47 inches (120 cm); a table for eight needs at least 59 inches (150 cm).
- Allow 24 by 15 inches (60 by 35 cm) per place setting, including plate, cutlery, and glasses. What matters is not the width of the chair, but elbow room. A rectangular table needs to be at least 32 inches (80 cm) wide.
- Remember to take account of the position of the table legs when you are working out how many guests you can seat. The measurements of the tabletop can be misleading if the table legs are awkwardly positioned or at an extreme angle.
- Allow at least 28 inches (70 cm) between the dining chairs and the wall or other furniture to allow diners to pull out the chairs and sit down without difficulty. If the table and chairs are close to a sideboard with drawers, measure the distance with the drawers open, especially if you are likely to need to open the drawers

during the meal.

- Allow extra space between the dining chairs and the countertops in order to open cupboard doors and drawers. There should be about 47 inches (120 cm) between the edge of the table and neighboring cupboards.



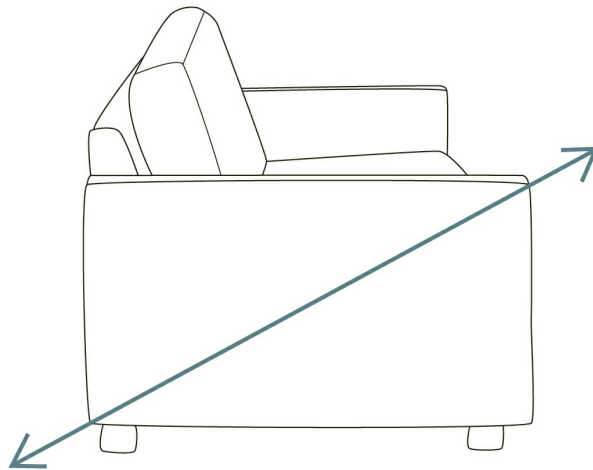
Study It from All Angles Before You Buy!

When choosing a table, don't forget to look at the underside. There is nothing more maddening than catching your clothes on unsanded wood, protruding screws, or splintered surfaces.

Living Rooms

Living rooms often have to house sofas and armchairs and, in some cases, a dining table and chairs, too. For a design to be functional, it is important to ensure there is enough space between furniture for people to move around unhindered as well as to put down a coffee cup without having to get up from the sofa. Here are some useful guidelines to keep in mind when planning the living room.

- A sofa should not take up more than two-thirds of the wall it sits against. Anything more than that and the room will feel overfurnished.
- A coffee table should not be more than two-thirds the length of the sofa. If the sofa is very long, it's better to have two smaller coffee tables or a nest of tables that can be tucked under one another to avoid the appearance of two long parallel lines.
- Assuming the sofa is of standard height, a good height for the coffee table is 16 inches (40 cm). There should be about 12 to 16 inches (30 to 40 cm) between the edge of the sofa and the table, so that sitting down is not a problem, but the table has to be close enough to allow a newspaper or coffee cup to be put down without the need to stand up or stretch too far.
- There needs to be sufficient room between the other pieces of furniture to allow people to move around easily: 20 to 24 inches (50 to 60 cm) is a reasonable space to leave for a passageway.
- Position the furniture so that people can hear and see one another when seated. A notional circle of 8¼ to 10 feet (250 to 300 cm) is about right; more than that and chatting can be difficult, much less and people may feel uncomfortably close.
- Footstools or ottomans should ideally be a little lower than the sofa, both to create a more balanced feel and to make it more comfortable to put your feet up.
- Bookcases that hold standard-size books should be at least 12 inches (30 cm) deep—16 inches (40 cm) if they are to house larger photographic and art books. Paperbacks can be housed in shallower shelves, as they are rarely more than 4¼ inches (11 cm) wide.
- In furnishing a room, make sure you keep passageways clear to both balcony doors and in and out of the room.
- The dimensions of sofas and armchairs vary, but the usual width of each seat is at least 24 inches (60 cm).
- Ensure that the position of the bulb in a light fixture with nonglare shades will not blind anyone sitting on the living room sofa or in an armchair.
- A large chandelier that you have to walk beneath should be at least 78 inches (6½ feet / 200 cm) from the floor. If it is a crystal chandelier with holders for candles, you will have to be very careful as the heat from lighted candles too close to the ceiling can cause discoloration or, worse, be a fire hazard.

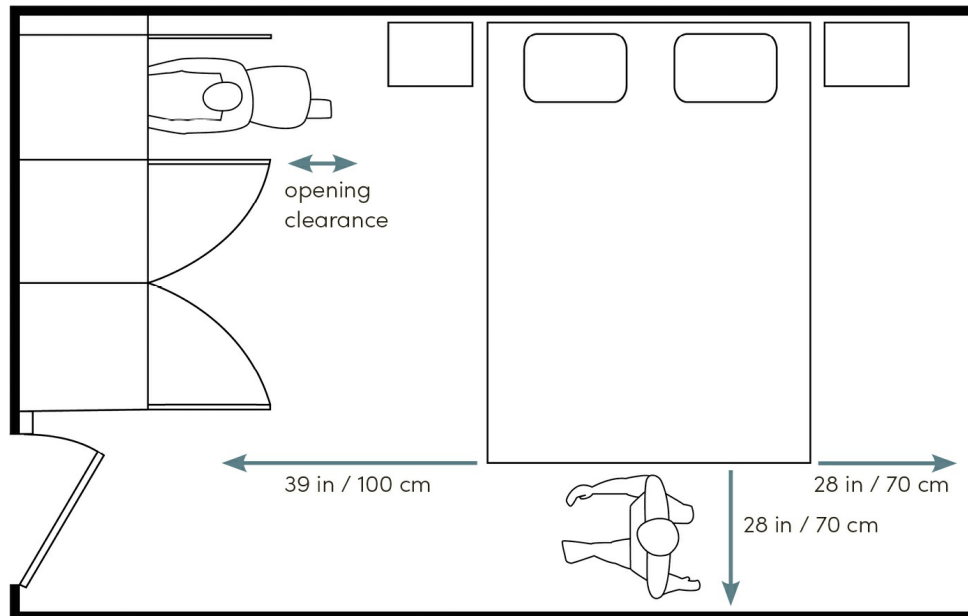


Don't forget to take the internal measurements of elevators, doorways, passageways, and stairways and compare them with the diagonal dimensions of any furniture before you order larger items like sofas and beds. If you live in a house, it is sensible to check the width of the main door, as well as the opening radius of the main door in the hall; stairwells and any other potential entry routes for bringing big pieces of furniture into the ground floor or taking them upstairs must also be checked. If the usual points of entry are too narrow, it is sometimes possible to hoist a bulky item up through a large upstairs window or balcony.

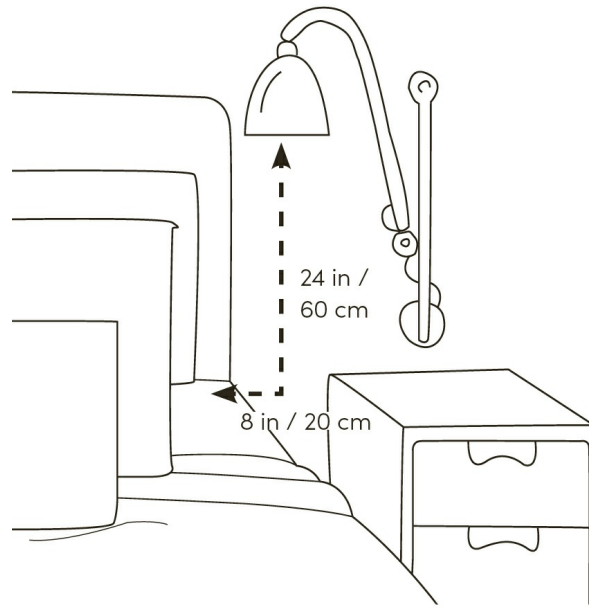
Bedrooms

Measurements and dimensions are much less important in bedrooms than in kitchens, although there are a number of guidelines that will help make them as harmonious and practical as possible. After all, if there is one room in the house where we don't want to feel bothered by design problems, it's the room in which we relax and rest.

Firstly, in order that the room does not feel overfurnished, it is important that the dimensions of the bed be in proportion to the size of the room. In the case of newly built homes, the architect's plan usually shows quite clearly the bed size a room is designed to take. On the other hand, if you are renovating and changing the layout and purpose of the rooms in your house, it is worth taking a moment to think about the minimum dimensions recommended for a bedroom and how much room is needed around the bed to make it easy to get in and out without difficulty. The positioning and height of lamps, bedside tables, and other furniture will also influence both functionality and feel. The diagram gives a few of the most important bedroom measurements.



- Twin beds are 39 inches (96.5 cm) wide and primarily designed for one occupant. Full beds are 54 inches (134.5 cm) wide and designed for two occupants. Queen beds are 60 inches (152.5 cm) and king-size beds are 76 inches (193 cm).
- Ideally there should be 4 inches (10 cm) between your head and the head of the bed and 4 inches (10 cm) between your feet and the foot of the bed. If you are taller than 6 feet 5 inches (196 cm), many bed manufacturers recommend a bed 83 inches (210 cm) long. (Standard bed length is 78 inches / 203.5 cm.)
- The height of beds varies a little, depending on make and model. Usually, 22 to 24 inches (55 to 60 cm) is considered the right height for a bed, but if you like sitting on the edge of the bed, 18 to 20 inches (45 to 50 cm) is more comfortable. Continental beds can sometimes be as high as 30 inches (75 cm), including mattress and legs; this needs to be considered if you are planning on having small children in bed with you—it's a long way down if they fall out of bed during the night.
- And bedroom lighting? It depends on whether you often read in bed or whether the lighting is mainly background lighting while you are getting ready for bed. If the light is for reading by, and especially if you read both lying and sitting, it really needs to be adjustable, both in terms of height and sideways movement. The best position for a wall-mounted light will depend on the bed frame and the height of the mattress from the floor, since that will decide the position of your eyes while lying and sitting. Take care to avoid glare, both for the reader and for their companion, who may be trying to go to sleep.
- Beds should be positioned so that there is a free space at least 28 inches (70 cm) wide between the long side of a twin bed and the nearest wall; in the case of larger beds, there should be 28 inches (70 cm) on both sides. Don't forget to allow extra space if there are doors that might hit the bed or bedside tables when opened.
- The best height for the bedside table will depend on the height of the bed, including legs and mattress. The usual measurement is in the 20- to 30-inch (50 to 70 cm) range.
- The optimal height for a wall-mounted bed or reading lamp is determined by the mattress on the bed. When the interiors architect Karin Espinosa Morel was designing three hundred hotel rooms for a firm of architects in Brussels, she came up with a clever formula for working out the optimal height: first measure 8 inches (20 cm) out from the edge of the mattress, then measure 24 inches (60 cm) up from that point; the light fixture should be attached so that the source of the light is at this point.



- When working with the dimensions of the furniture in the room, allow for the fact that the bed frame and upholstered ends of the bed will be about an inch more than the size of the mattress.
- The headboard should be at least 8 inches (20 cm) higher than the mattress in order to protect the wall and to stop pillows from falling off.
- If you are constructing a bunk bed, the space between the beds should be sufficient for adults to sit up without banging their heads.

Home Offices

Whether you are studying, working from home, or using the home office mainly as a hobby room, it's best to think ergonomically in order to avoid neck and back problems caused by sitting for hours at a time. And from my own experience, I would encourage you to choose a desk with a work surface big enough to hold your computer, as well as the books, notepads, papers, and course materials you need to access while working at the computer. Here are some useful measurements.

- In order to have sufficient space for a computer, working materials, and enough room to rest your hands and arms, the desktop should measure 30 by 47 to 59 inches (75 by 120 to 150 cm). If you are intending to use a computer at the desk, the depth of the desk ought to be at least 32 inches (80 cm) for a slim monitor and about 39 inches (100 cm) for a desktop computer.
- The usual height of a desk is about 30 inches (75 cm)—a little lower for working at a computer.
- The seat of a desk chair should measure 16 by 20 inches (40 by 50 cm), with a seat height of 16¼ to 18 inches (41 to 45 cm).
- A desk chair with legs will need roughly 28 inches (70 cm) of space from the nearest edge of the desk, although 24 inches (60 cm) is often sufficient for a swivel chair.
- A swivel chair on castors will need more space than a fixed swivel chair since the castors can glide on the floor. To facilitate access into and out of the chair, allow the same space as for a chair with legs.
- Armrests on desk chairs should be adjustable both for height and for sideways movement. It should also be simple to move them out of the way, to remove them in order to adapt the chair to different users, and to allow the user to sit close to the desk.
- There should be plenty of room under the desk for legs and knees. Avoid anything that can get in the ways of the user's legs (pillar legs, wide aprons on the desk, or filing cabinets, for instance).

If you often host dinner parties with many guests, it would be worth choosing a desk the same height and width as your dining table. It can then be used as an extra table for large parties.

Laundry Rooms

There are various measurements you will need to stick to if you are to get the best out of your laundry room. A number of these refer to movable furniture and items. Don't fill the space in front of front-loading machines with laundry baskets or large containers that have to be moved every time you want to fill the machines, and don't occupy more space than you absolutely have to. Here are some guidelines for planning a laundry room.

- You need to leave room to work in front of each of the machines and cupboards: 59 by 59 inches (150 by 150 cm) is sufficient.
- The distance between the bottom edge of the doors on washing machines and dryers and the floor should be at least 20 inches (50 cm), preferably 30 inches (75 cm), to make it easier to load and unload heavy, wet wash.
- If you choose a front-loading machine, don't forget to take into account the doors on neighboring cupboards. And remember to allow for the space needed to open the door into the laundry room, especially when there is already someone else in the room.

9

Planning Your Interior Project

Collecting pictures and samples that provide you with ideas and turning them into a collage that gives a visual impression of what you want to achieve is sometimes referred to as making a *mood board*. It sounds simple enough to make a plan by bringing together a few photos of ideas that appeal to you, but I am sure that many people who have tried to do that have hit a wall at some stage of the process. Turning all those nice but often disparate photos and ideas into something usable is not as easy as it sounds. This chapter will suggest some ideas and approaches that will facilitate the planning process and make it easier to work successfully with a mood board.

Mood Boards

Professional stylists and designers always make a mood board before starting on an interiors project. Their aim is partly to test out various ideas as they work their way toward a good concept and partly to provide other people—clients and customers—with a clear idea of the feel and style they are trying to achieve. A mood board, then, is not just for your own personal use in the planning process; it's also a first-rate tool for initiating others—family members, tradesmen, shop assistants—into your plans. The clearer the visual representation of your aims, the easier it will be for others to advise and assist you.



If you build a three-dimensional mood board, it will obviously be easier to photograph it with your cell phone than to carry it with you to the shop. This also has the advantage that you have it at hand if you happen to come across something you fancy, or should you need to refresh your memory.

The Funnel Technique

You can make a mood board at different phases of the interiors or building project. The focus of the mood board at an early stage tends to be abstract, dealing more with feelings and arriving at a consensus expressed in broad brushstrokes rather than concrete ideas and detailed suggestions. But the closer you come to the final stages, the more concrete the mood board becomes until, ultimately, it is not far from a shopping list.

If you are designing the interior of an existing house or room, there will be a variety of preexisting factors to take into account, but the exterior of the house (the period, structural materials, color of the facade, neighboring buildings, and so on) will help you funnel your ideas quite quickly from the abstract to the concrete and to move on to the details you have in mind. If you are uncertain of your own style, you will probably spend more time in the early stages sorting out abstract thoughts and your visions of the life you want to lead before you reach the stage where your mood board becomes a shopping list.

Slicing the Pie

Start by thinking about the way the room is used—the questions in the first chapter offer a good starting point. How do you envision living there? How do you want it to be? Some people know exactly which functions to prioritize, others find it trickier.

Draw a circle diagram and sketch in the different activities that will take place in the room as different-size slices of a pie. Think about how many hours of the day or week will be spent on each activity, or which activities you feel are most important. This will make it easier for you to form an overview of the situation and to understand what the new design has to cater to. Then you can prioritize.

The Ingredients of a Mood Board

There simply isn't a universal recipe for a mood board. Every human being is different. Some people find it easier to picture the final result in their mind's eye, others need more help and support along the way. I have listed a few of the ingredients that are worth thinking about, but they aren't compulsory. It is up to you to decide what you need.

1. Feel/Target

Try to formulate clear targets that reflect the lifestyle and feel you are trying to achieve. If it's a living room you are working on, how do you dream of using it once it's finished? Do you picture evenings spent playing board games by the fire? Are you thinking of snuggling down on the sofa for cozy family film nights? What about grand parties with loads of people and room for that big dining table you have always dreamed of? Search for photos and pictures that illustrate and symbolize the mood and the activity (or activities) you want to include.

Once you have decided on what you want (and need) and have settled on your desired targets and feel, then it's time to begin the research phase—which is the starting point for most people. Go out and seek inspirational pictures and ideas! Keep an open mind and save everything—nice rooms, smart solutions, wonderful colors, anything that makes your heart beat a little faster. Along with magazines, catalogs, and brochures, the Internet is an unbeatable source of inspiration. But you must be clear about your needs and targets, or you will end up in a state of confusion. It's easy to get lost at this stage—which doesn't really matter as long as it's temporary. After all, the idea is for you to experiment, try out your taste, and so on. You can expect to spend some time circling around ideas before you finally home in on what you really like and want.

2. Exterior

Is there anything about the exterior of the house and its architecture that will help advance your interiors project? The color of the facade, the materials, the style, the

history—anything at all that could kick-start your project?

3. Styles

Once you've been through a huge number of photographs of interiors, the type and style of interior that speaks to you will begin to emerge. The challenge now is to find the courage to sort through everything and to be selective so that your vision becomes clearer in your own mind.

- Be honest. What are the things you like best, as opposed to ideas you have hung on to because they may impress others? Remove anything that does not feel 100 percent you!
- What (given some imagination and prioritization) is achievable and what is out of reach, however much effort you put into it? There is no point in depressing yourself by saving for something that is ultimately unachievable.
- Be reasonable (well, just a little). What is suitable for your present stage in life, and what is clearly impractical during the coming years? I know that a lot of frustration arises from unrealistic visions that have little connection with everyday life. It may seem tragically sad and tedious to have to bring your dreams down to earth, but there is much to be gained by doing so—sometimes, anyway. Be kind to yourself: life has different phases and your dreams may not work just now (thanks to finances, small children, commuting, and all the other things that throw a monkey wrench into your plans), and it is better to recognize that and set the ideas aside rather than plow on stubbornly. Work with the conditions rather than against them.

Once you have whittled down the number of photographs, it becomes much easier to interpret the contents. What is it that attracts you about these pictures in particular? What features in them create the style? Which of those stylistic elements will you need to follow to achieve something similar in your own home? Here are some of the common denominators that recur in the pictures:

- Choice of furniture and key accessories
- Pronounced shapes and silhouettes (draped or rigid fabrics, for instance)
- Details such as picture walls or individual pictures
- Lighting and lamps that create mood and style
- Rugs and floors
- Plants (leafy or otherwise)
- Feel (bohemian or minimalist, for instance)
- Color palette (warm or cold)

4. Existing Furniture

A mistake made by many people when working with their mood board is to fail to take existing furniture into account. We rarely furnish a room from scratch, and an interiors plan based on a mood board that includes only the new items being added is neither very practical nor realistic.

When choosing the colors for your home, it is much more sensible to take objects you have inherited, or things you have lived with for years and don't want to part with, as your starting point. This will make it easier to integrate the new and the old in your home, and it will also give you a color palette likely to last, because it's based on things you have real affection for rather than this year's fashion.

To include these older details in your mood board, you will need to search the Internet for photos of furniture similar to what you own—auction house websites are a good place to look. Otherwise, just take photos with your cell phone and print them out so that you can include them in the mood board.

5. Color Palette

The next stage is to think about which colors work best for you. Look again at "Design Anxiety or Sensitivity" on [this page](#). Play with different color combinations until you find one that feels right. Your aim is to establish which colors or color palette the final interior will have.

6. Materials Palette

Which materials do you want to work with? Try to define the fundamental materials you want in your home. Do you prefer light wood or dark wood? Do you like warm or cold metals (chrome, silver, pewter, brass, or copper)? Do you enjoy natural materials or powder-coated finishes? If your mood board is a three-dimensional one, it is sometimes possible to order samples of flooring, natural stone, and moldings from manufacturers and retailers, which makes it much easier to reach decisions on everything from furniture to small fittings.

7. Textiles Palette

Textures of different kinds are important elements in making a home feel cozy and lived in. Textiles are particularly rewarding when it comes to creating variation, so it's worth using your mood board to play with the textiles in a room or in your home in general. Do you like velvet and heavy brocades, or do you prefer sheer voile and cool linen sheets? Look for pictures or get ahold of samples of the fabrics you want for your interior.

8. Sensuality

An interiors project can very easily stop short at what the eye can see! But what will the room feel like? What about our other senses? What will it feel like to the touch? What do you want the room or the house to smell of—and why? What kind of soundscape do you want around you? Are there childhood memories or associations you would like to trigger?

Afterword

Interior design is cool, but it can also be difficult. The fact that so much of it is about likes and taste makes it more than a little tricky. On one hand, people frequently say there are no rules; on the other, when you talk to architects and designers, it becomes quite clear that there is a consensus about such things as proportions, composition, and harmony. But we seem to find it difficult to put into words. You will rarely get simple, straightforward answers, whether you are talking to a layperson or a professional.

What I have tried to do in this book is to simplify and explain—to the best of my ability—the many, sometimes contradictory, rules of thumb that are commonly accepted in the world of interiors.

One of the things I found missing in modern aesthetic thinking was any reference to ergonomics. A design, after all, should be more than attractive to look at; it should also be pleasant and functional for the human body to live and work in. It is not always easy to know how to achieve that. This is why I have spent so much time gathering and sorting many different recommendations and measurements: I want to make them easier to understand, particularly for people who have never thought of these things before.

You certainly don't have to agree with or use all the tips I have given in the book, but if you take away something that helps you live better in your home, then my hard work has been rewarded. As the old saying goes, There's no place like home.

Good luck with yours,
Frida

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Interviewees and Advisors

Eva Atle Bjarnestam, style historian and writer

Robin Barnholdt, buildings antiquarian

Hildur Bladh, color expert

Kelley Carter, interiors journalist

Åsa Fjellstad, lighting expert

Louise Klarsten, color expert, ColourHouse AB

Karin Lindberg, wallpaper expert

Dagny Thurmann-Moe, color expert

Anyone we have been unable to identify and acknowledge here is welcome to contact the publisher.

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