

THE ART OF
ARRANGEMENT

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Day Five—The Art of Arrangement

"Music is the space between the notes."

Claude Debussy

Just as music is in the space between notes, harmony is found in the space we create between furniture, art and accessories. In both staging and redesign, it's all in the details, and space is a detail often ignored. We've talked in depth about the principles of good design, so let's move on to specific elements that effect those principles: Space and Flow (Arrangement), Color and Lighting. Since there are volumes written on each, I'll take them day by day.

Most decorating and design books make the assumption that you are designing a furniture arrangement from a blank canvas. Your room is empty and the decisions involve purchasing furniture to fit the space. As you know, home staging and redesign is VERY different, except in the case of vacant homes, which I'll touch upon in Week 3.

In staging and redesign we are using the owner's current pieces, incorporating what we know about the principles of design and transforming the space. Since the art of great arrangement is fairly universal, there is not a lot of difference in this section between staging and redesign. In a practical way, I'm going to tackle the art of arranging furniture, artwork, and accessories. Ultimately it's all about the space between pieces and the music we create...

The Art of Furniture Arrangement

This is the fun part: taking what people already have and rearranging it to create a comfortable, balanced, scaled, functional, properly emphasized and beautiful composition! This is at the heart of staging and redesign! I've seen many a trainer recommend completely clearing the space to create your vision, but I say, no way! You don't need to completely clear out a room to create your vision of how the arrangement should look...ugh...what a waste of time that would be! I'm going to give you a few of my rules of thumb and then we'll talk step-by-step practicality.

Three Steps of Successful Furniture Arrangement:

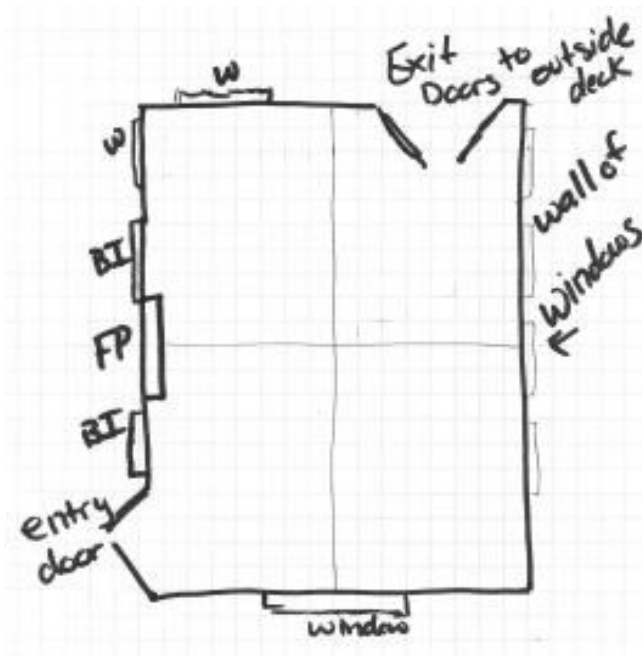
- **Find the Lines** – The mind looks for lines of order and balance when viewing a room, wall or shelf. Find the balance lines on the floor of the room.
- **Find Focal Point and Function** – What do I need to emphasize? What is this room used for? Does it draw me in to its purpose? Where do people look first?
- **Find the Flow** – What is the pattern of traffic from door to door?

Step One – Find the Lines



Hands On: Take a sheet of graph paper and draw the outline of your living room. Note the doors, windows and fireplace. Now draw two lines, crisscrossed and separate the room in four quadrants. These lines will help us balance the row boat once we've placed our furniture in the last step.

Great! Now you've just completed step one. That should be fairly easy to do in your head or on graph paper at a client's home...no need to remove all the furniture. Usually, you'll find that one of the lines bisects a focal point whether it's a fireplace or large window. You'll want to place your main seating area in the center where the lines connect.



Above is a very rough drawing of my living room. You can see that I have a fireplace (FP) which is bisected by my balance line. I have two built-ins (BI) on either side of my fireplace, a wall of windows opposite the fireplace, double doors leading into my living room from the entry and French doors leading out of my living room onto a deck.

This leads us to step two...

Step Two – Find the Focal Point and Function

We've covered focal points but also want to couple that with the function of the room when we are designing our furniture arrangement. In my case, the fireplace is the obvious focal point, but my living room functions as a place to watch TV, to read, and to entertain. This can lead to competing focal points--not what we want!



Note: In all cases where you have a fireplace and a TV which are competing focal points, try and put them as close together as possible, so your furniture arrangement works by emphasizing the more attractive focal point (Fireplace) while keeping the function of the room (TV watching) intact. (Unless of course the TV can be hidden in an armoire.)

That's why it's important to discover the primary use of the room. In staging, we still need the space to be livable for the owner but this is where we can talk about "ideally" creating one TV room in the family room and making the living room a place for entertaining, reading and conversation. Your first inclination may be to follow our emphasis rules and place the seating arrangement in such a way as to highlight the fireplace: a loveseat on either side facing one another perhaps. But wait, because we need to tackle the next step before we can create a definite seating arrangement...

Step Three – Find the Flow

Notice the entry and exit doors of the living room, because they will dictate the flow and traffic of the room, which must be functional. An arrangement of doors like that found in my living room is common. It's what I call the diagonal traffic pattern, and it invariably conflicts with the seating arrangement that we would like to place at the cross bars of our balance lines. This is not a problem because we can dictate the traffic pattern; we just can't dictate where the pattern comes from, i.e. doorways.



Note: A major traffic passageway should be at least 4 feet wide in order to allow two people to pass each other. For subsidiary passageways, allow at least 18 inches. Between the couch and coffee table you can go as little as 12 inches, but that's it.

Guidelines for Placing Your Pieces

Now that you've considered the three steps above, you can begin placing the furniture that you have available to you. Here are a few other things to consider before placing furniture.

- No matter how large or small the room, the scale of the human form dictates appropriate space between objects in terms of function, conversation and comfort. There should always be comfortable walking space between the sofa and coffee table, and between other pieces in the room. The conversation pieces should be no more than 8 feet apart.
- The scale of the pieces should be appropriate to one another and to the size of the room. For large rooms, pick the largest pieces in the home to work with. Steal the large bedside table from the bedroom if you can't find a side table for the couch.
- There should be a variety of places to sit in order to accommodate and entertain 4+ people. Try to anchor your conversation area using rugs if there is hardwood or tile.
- Each seating arrangement needs appropriate light for reading.
- There must be a place near each seat to put a glass or coffee cup.
- In a small room, try not to place all the furniture along the walls, but use the space and keep to the center of the room where our axis points cross. This should tighten your conversation area to conform to the 8-foot rule so that no one has to shout to be heard.
- Likewise, in a large room, you can "float" the furniture and create groupings around the main conversation area. Just be wary of lighting issues, since cords cannot cross a traffic path.
- Especially in staging, do not crowd the room's entrance. We want to create long sight lines, so that people can view the entire room. Don't block the view with furniture.

Now that we've noted all that we have to work with in a room, it's time to arrange our pieces. Unlike designers who are "shopping" for pieces, we need to use what we have available. MANY possible seating scenarios are possible with what is already in the room.

In one of my favorite books, Lauri Ward's "Use What You Have Decorating", she is emphatic about placing the sofa opposite the focal point and two chairs in a U-shape on either side of the sofa for ease of conversation. While these kinds of "rules of placement" may make our job easier, they don't work in all cases. For example, in cases

where the traffic pattern enters into the room toward the fireplace, the sofa would have its back to the room's entrance, making most people very uncomfortable! I don't know about you but I do not like my back to a room. Another example: in an ideal world, we would walk into a home and always find a sofa and two matching club chairs. We all know that this isn't so because most people buy a sofa and a love seat!

A U-shaped seating arrangement opposite the focal point is ideal WHEN the flow enters from the sides and you can create one using the furniture you have available. Starting with the couch let me show you some practical arrangements that cover most seating possibilities and take into consideration the lines, focal point and flow of the room:



<<Long sofa and loveseat (Lofa)– Ideally place the sofa along the longest wall facing the focal point. Create a conversation area by placing the love seat adjacent in an L-shape while balancing the loveseat with a pair of chairs on the other side.

<<If the focal point is not facing the longest wall, keep the sofa on the longest wall and face the loveseat to the focal point.

If there is no fireplace, keep the sofa on the long wall and follow the focal point rules.

Long Sofa and Two Chairs - This is an example as to why the U-shaped rule would not work. Can you imagine walking into the back of the sofa in this room which would also block the gorgeous fireplace?! Not all focal points are equal and if you have a great one, emphasize it. This room invites and still keeps the spirit of a good conversation area.>>

If the entry does NOT face the focal point, it's ideal to follow a U-shaped pattern around the focal point.





Sectionals – Remember our fundamental rules, one of which is scale? Sectionals work in very large rooms because they match the scale of the room. Use the same rules with the sectional as you would with a sofa and loveseat; if the room is not big enough for the sectional, by all means break it up.

Once you've arranged your main furniture grouping along the center of your balance lines, you may have room to create other arrangements, depending upon the size of the room. Keep plenty of space between arrangements. In all cases, less is more, so choose the best pieces carefully and arrange them by size in the room.



Hands On: Take a critical look at the seating arrangement in your living and family room areas. Do they follow the above rules for balance, conversation and flow?

The Art of Accessory Arrangement

Once you've placed the main pieces of furniture throughout the room, it's easy to add accessories and art as dressing to the composition. Remember, the goals are: to always keep our design principles in mind and to use art and accessories as tools to express the personality of the owner (in redesign) or to modernize and update the room (in staging). In staging, I refer to accessories and artwork as small investments in the modernization of a home because it's the details that really count!

For staging, choose accessories and art that universally work well and modernize any setting without portraying a fetish, hobby or profile of the owner. For redesign, it's all about the owners and surrounding them with the things they love, so have them choose their favorites and group around them! In all cases, there are simple design rules to follow when placing accessories...

Four Easy Steps of Successful Accessory Arrangement:

- **Group in odd numbers, preferably three or five pieces**
- **Group in different heights, one tall, one medium and one small for interest**
- **Group in like type or colors, type or pairs (repetition)**
- **Go organic! Choose a living accessory like a plant, wood bowl or shell**

It's really as easy as that! I'm going to show you some classic accessory groupings for each area of the home. But, first having told you what you *should* do, let me tell you what you *shouldn't* do...



Danger:

- Don't place accessories in each corner of the table
- Don't place accessories in a straight line
- Don't crowd the space with too much
- Don't place accessories in such a way that they block the conversation or view of a seated guest



Hands On: Find your favorite accessory and place it against a blank wall in your home. Notice how every detail stands out? Now add two more pieces of varying heights. Each adds interest and compliments the arrangement. Now add five more pieces and see how it feels. Now your brain has too many things to focus on, so nothing stands out and the group looks crowded and cluttered. This displays the concept of how less is actually more because it allows us to truly appreciate and examine what we see.

Great Examples of Accessory Arrangement



Simplicity is key! To get the right heights you can stack books and place a piece on top of them.

The Art of Wall Arrangement

Wall art is good to place last because it can help to balance, add rhythm, texture or drama once the space is assessed. It is the icing on the cake of the room and should be used wisely! Think outside of the box when it comes to wall art: Don't just think of paintings. Wall art can incorporate mirrors, sconces, textile art, matted photographs, shelving, tapestry, ironwork and screens. I'll show you tons of creative and easy ways to create art on a budget, as well as a simple way to hang groups of work right every time!

As in our scale and proportion lesson, appropriately sized artwork should hang at the appropriate height on a wall. By far the biggest decorating mistakes you'll see people make will involve hanging a small picture above a couch (scale problem) OR hanging art too high.

Four Steps for Successful Wall Arrangement:

- **Get the Right Height** – Most people hang art too high, so shoot a little lower than you normally feel is right. This typically means that the center of the painting will be at eye level as you enter a room.
- **Find the Right Scale** – When hanging any art over a couch, the piece or grouping should be at least 3 feet across and ideally 4-5 ft across. Likewise, consider arranging art across a wall so that it fills at least 1/3 the distance of the space and covers at least 2/3 the distance of the wall space over the furniture item.
- **Group Right and Like** – Group one of three ways (see below) and match the mats and types of art for cohesion (see below)
- **Shoot for Three** – Don't distance pieces of artwork more than 5 inches away from each other and ideally three inches.

Just as there are some Do's, here are the Don'ts...



Danger:

- Don't fill every space on every wall
- Don't hang anything without first finding the stud unless you use *Monkey Hooks* (buy them at Target)
- Don't hang a grouping WITHOUT placing them on the floor and planning them out first
- Don't use cheap frames with no matting!
- Don't hang anything in a narrow space—this only crowds the small space.
- Don't hang groupings in such a way that they are wider than the furniture beneath them. The eye wants to see stacked items in a room, so the wider piece needs to be on the bottom.



Note: Mirrors can be very strategic in changing the dimensions and feel of a room! Always consider what the mirror is reflecting and try and hang it opposite a window for best light reflection.

Creating a Grouping on a Wall Three Ways

1. **Line Them Up** – You can arrange all your photos along a vertical or horizontal line. You can change the appearance of the dimensions of the room. Hanging photos vertically makes ceilings appear taller while horizontally elongates the wall.

This vertical arrangement is in a simple line up the wall, heaviest on the bottom>>



2. **Shape Them Up** – Imagine a rectangle or square on the wall and hang pictures within the borders. This is an easy way to decorate an oddly shaped space.

>>This arrangement uses all kinds of wall hangings to create a loose vertical rectangle

3. **Above and Below** – Imagine a horizontal line or multiple horizontal lines, and arrange groups of photos above and below the line. Make sure to cover the same area above and below to avoid a top- or bottom-heavy arrangement.

Do you see the imaginary line that bisects these two rows of pictures?>>



Unique Wall Treatments

Ready to get your creative decorating juices flowing? Here are some great examples of easy ways to create and hang art...

Budget Matting – Fabric was wrapped around a canvas and thick decorative paper was cut as a matting and glue gunned to the fabric in order to frame the photo. A fake Hawaiian flower was hung to complete the theme and effect.



<<**Budget Artwork** – Vintage pages from a classic early reader book were used in these plain frames dressed to kill with hanging pink bows.

Creative Budget Arrangement – You don't even notice the inexpensive white frames because of the textured, rich fabrics used as art! Yep, each picture is actually a piece of silken fabric, framed!>>



Unique Wall Treatments

Creative Artwork

There are so many things you can use as art and put in a frame! Some of my favorites are:

- Calendars
- Picture books
- Vintage botanical books
- Magazine covers
- Fabric
- Wall paper
- Wrapping paper
- Postcards

Pick a theme, find a coffee table book and get your scissors!



I hope you are inspired! There is so much you can do with art in the digital age. Take a photo that you love, scan it into your printer as a print image and play with it using contrast, color, sepia, etc..



Hands On: Go to your local bookstore and hit the calendar and budget coffee table book sections to find pictures to frame. Trust me, you'll be inspired and find numerous resources when you go with this express purpose!

Unique Wall Treatments

Creative Wall Hangings

You don't have to limit yourself to paper! Be creative and see what happens...here's some ideas:

- Plates
- Plaques
- Seashells
- Hats
- Dresses
- Fabric Board
- Letters
- Vases
- Sconces
- Tapestry



So many times in staging and redesign we become frustrated because most people do not have enough wall hangings for us to work with. I hope this lesson has changed your mind about that and given you a vision of the many things you can work with in a home.



Hands On: Take a walk around your home and consider things that might look better on the wall. I found an antique screen in my living room that would look great as a headboard behind my bed.

A Word About Home Staging and Photos...My Two Cents

Before I move on to the next area of arrangement, I want to cover a question that invariably comes up: “Do you remove all the photos from a seller’s home when staging? If so, then aren’t you frequently left with nothing to hang?”

The goal of staging is to create a home, vision and life that the typical buyer would aspire to. Not all photos are contrary to this goal. In fact, attractive photos of travel, fun, boating, skiing, beach going, biking etc. all might help to emotionally connect buyers to what life might be like if they lived in this home. My husband has coined these photos as “The Good Life” photos. I love this name because it fits the vision of what we as stagers are trying to project. If I buy this home, my family and I can live like this. “Good Life” photos are filled with action and emotion--they are not sedentary poses or portraits. “Good Life” photos make us want to project ourselves wherever the photo was taken.

As you stage a home and view the photos you have to work with, consider using “The Good Life” test. When looking at a photo, ask whether it is an attractive portrayal of the Jones’ “Good Life”? If so, keep it. If not, use one of your many art ideas pre-printed and have the seller open the frame and put the picture in. That’s why it’s always a great idea to keep a folder of pre-printed images in a multitude of sizes to give to clients. You can bet they’ll be impressed!

“Good Life” photos can have a powerful emotional effect on buyers because they draw them further into the life of the home. We all want to live like the Jones’ and these photos give us a glimpse of what that life can be like. Use photos wisely, as a huge merchandising lesson in staging. Use intimate, black and white photos of the couple walking on the beach for the bedroom. Use travel, action photos of the family in the family room.

Here are some quick examples from my own family album from last month’s Thanksgiving trip. While not the best I have, these are quick but good examples of the kind of active life that one might aspire to in the San Diego region where “desert toys” are cool and desired by most. I bet you would never have imagined me to be a dirt bunny but here I am in a dune buggy in the high desert.



Given the powerful emotional pull of photos of fantastic places, times, friends and fun, it becomes even more critical to use these photos in our redesigned homes as well!

A Word about Redesign and Photos...My Two Cents

Ironically, we all have “Good Life” photos in our albums but the ones we normally are taught to hang are the ones we paid money for...the portraits. Portrait photos will never inspire intimate emotion, recall special times, tell funny stories or create conversation like “Good Life” photos do.

"Interior Redesign is using limited funds, practical creativity and extraordinary expertise to transform a home so that it becomes infinitely more attractive, personal, comfortable, functional and reflective to the needs, desires and style of the home owner, while in turn becoming a small investment of the home owner in the future greater home sale earnings it retrieves."

What better way to achieve this goal than to have the owners take their “Good Life” photos and place them in the frames over the stale portraits?! Nothing draws me more emotionally than photos of wonderful times in my life. It makes sense to surround our homeowners with these photos of love, friends, fun, exotic places, funny stories and times we dared. Did you know that it costs less than \$3.00 to blow up a photo to an 8x10 at Costco?

Each room in the home should reflect and create an emotion in the owners, reminding them of why they are special. We know that positive verbal reinforcement is critical to personal growth, so likewise is positive visual reinforcement. I bet you never thought of this before, but surrounding ourselves with love, intimacy, confidence, inspiration, spirit and life are all essential ingredients in loving our home and each space within.

Do me a favor, every time you go into a Redesign appointment, as part of your clients' homework have them look for “Good Life” photos and give them to you. Ask them to tap into their emotions and pull the photos that inspire them, make them laugh, remember, and feel loved. Unlike staging, this isn't about what others would think about the photo, it's personal. Their journey should dig deep into the well of their soul and recall moments of peace, serenity, freedom and wistfulness. When we redesign, we create an emotional house. Every room has specific photo needs if we are to create the kind of mood we want our owners to feel:

- **Living Area** – This is an area of reflection, so photos should recall exotic places we've visited and times in our life that fill us with gratitude, warmth, adventure and inspiration.
- **Family and Kitchen Areas** – These are areas of entertaining, games and fun, so photos should reflect times with friends, camping trips, boating adventures, skiing, parties and close-up emotions on faces.
- **Master Bedroom** – This room is all about intimacy, so choose photos that emotionally draw you closer to your spouse. No kid photos in the bedroom!
- **Dining Room or Formal Master Bathroom** – Landscapes of things we have seen and places we have been.

- **Casual Bathroom** – Think bare and fun since this is humorous place to view photos anyway. I have a photo of my son and niece at 6 months old sitting gloriously naked in the grass with their backsides to the camera...needless to say it's adorable!
- **Children's Rooms** – Surround your children with love and attention by hanging reinforcing photos of special times together, birthdays and hugs with friends.

Are you getting the picture?

Once they have found these photos, walk through the home and find frames that you can place them in once they are properly sized. Have them write the correct size and location on the back of the photo i.e. 5x7 in the kitchen and take them to Costco for resizing.

Can you imagine the power of pinpointing the mood and emotion you want for each room and having it radiantly reflected in photos throughout the spaces? Imagine a child waking up to a photo of the time his dad took him skiing or a photo of his mother giving him a big hug. When I left my children to go on a long trip, I gave each one a snow globe filled with two photos of just me and him hugging. To this day, I see them carry those snow globes around.

The day I discovered that the posed wedding photos and portrait pictures don't have to be used in prominent places was a liberating event for me. I imagine it will be the same for your clients.



Note: Spice your photo groupings with close-ups of faces that display emotion. Similar to a portrait, you get a good look at the subject but unlike a portrait it's a glimpse into the subject's mood and heart.



Hands On: Yep, you guessed it! Take a walk through your home and sit in each room. Ask yourself what kind of emotion you want reflected and look through your photo albums for photos to reinforce those powerful emotions. I think this exercise will have a more powerful effect on you and your family than any of the others!



Tip: For easy hanging, consider using Dry Wall Hooks from our Members Discount Area since they can easily be pushed into walls (without the use of a hammer) and can hold up to 150 lbs! The Dry Wall Hooks can also be purchased at Target and make the tiniest of holes in the wall that are barely detectable!

The Art of Arranging Bookcases and Built-ins

On this subject, I have a simple formula for staging and redesign alike: follow the rules for accessory arranging on each shelf and if the shelves are larger, do it twice. You may ask why redesign is the same as staging on this topic, but I truly believe in the concept that less is more, so adhering to it in spaces where we want to showcase our special things becomes all the more critical. If you have too many special things and would like to display them all, then simply swap them out by season rather than clutter a shelf. Here are some visuals...



Organizational Solutions - In children's rooms, use baskets in cubbies to incorporate the idea that everything has a place. Baskets are portable ways for them to easily clean their messes and stack them away.

