



Home Staging Resource
Solutions for Professional Home Stagers and Redesigners



LIVING

FAMILY

GREAT

ROOMS

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Day Nine - Living, Family and Great Rooms

Overview

Typically, the living and family rooms are the most public areas of the home. They are the places where you meet and greet company, lounge and watch TV, and also where you do most of your entertaining, which includes serving food and drinks. These rooms are the ultimate multi-purpose spaces, acting as the gathering spot for family, the media room where TV, computer and stereo reside, and as the entertainment hub. In both staging and redesign, it's important that we create living areas that can fulfill all of these purposes.

Since the living and family rooms are usually where the homeowner's comfort and style shine first, I'm going to approach this module in terms of redesign and decorating, BUT add a "For Staging" segment at the end of each section when applicable. Remember, in terms of our F-E-E-L H-O-M-E process, the only significant difference comes under the "H" category of "Home Buyers Appeal" OR "Home Owners Appeal" although this is a very big step in successful staging and redesign!

Since a lot of what goes into room-by-room redesign and staging has been covered in the *Week One Design Modules: Principles and Elements of Great Design*, I'll be referring back quite a bit in order to reinforce those materials in their practical application.

Finally, since each room-by-room module will be filled with redesign and staging activities to consider, feel free to take these ideas and incorporate them into your existing Client Action Plans in order to tailor them to your staging and redesign business.

Living Rooms, Family Rooms and Great Rooms - Oh My!

While all homes have a kitchen, not all homes have separate living and family room areas. Usually, when homes have just one "living area," it is called the "Great Room" as it is purposed to perform all the functions of both a living and a family room. We mentioned those various functions in our list above, but to put it simply, these rooms are for fellowship and entertainment.

The primary difference between the living and family rooms is that the living room is mostly for fellowship (entertaining) in a more formal environment while the family room is for entertainment (TV watching, game playing) in a more informal environment. Living rooms should be designed and staged as more formal gathering spaces and family rooms as more casual, kid friendly zones for game playing and TV watching.

For both redesign and staging, it's important to create those subtle differences of purpose in each room, and if there is only one great room, incorporate the whole enchilada! Why? Because both home owners and home buyers will be looking for all purposes to be fulfilled in a great room. In this module, I will reduce redundancy by tackling both rooms at once, since most of the decorating activities described would apply to both.

Living Rooms vs. Family Rooms - A Visual Idea Reference

Here are some visual examples of the subtle differences you can create between a living area and family area for both staging and redesign:

Living Rooms...

More formal room primarily for adults used for entertaining, special occasions and respite (reading and conversation).

Subtle Differences:

Coffee table has more exquisite accessories and coffee table books.
 Furniture has the luxury of being less durable (white) and more gracious.
 Pillows, in fabrics of less durability (silks and linens), are more dressy.



Notice the white couch?



Family Rooms...

More informal or casual room used for entire family (especially children) for TV watching, game playing and casual get-togethers.

Subtle Differences:

Coffee table is for putting feet up and relaxing.
 Holds casual, non-breakable accessories like games, baskets, plants and books. Furniture is more durable and fabrics are textured and resilient.



Notice the throw and coffee table displays?



Living Rooms vs. Family Rooms - A Visual Idea Reference

Living Rooms...



Family Rooms...



Five Steps to First Impression - Assess Almost Any Room

Before jumping into the sections on redesigning and staging for the living and family areas, I want to give you a quick checklist of my *Five Steps to Assess*, so you can always keep these in mind as you approach a space. This is your *First Impression Assessment* in the 8-step, F-E-E-L H-O-M-E approach. For practical purposes, I'll dig deeper into each one in this module, but I think you'll find that these steps will goof-proof your design, whether you're redesigning or staging almost any room in the home:

- ❖ **PURPOSE** – *Who* are we decorating for and *what* is the purpose of the space for them? Form follows function in both staging and redesign, so this room needs to work within the constraints of the owner's OR buyer's needs and preferences depending on whether you are staging or redesigning. Comfortable seating is arranged to encourage conversation, fellowship and entertainment. Coffee table and side tables are appropriately within reach (Space and Flow).

- ❖ **SPACE AND EMPHASIS** – *How* is the space shaped and *what* should the focal point be? The elements of the space must be in harmony with the architectural style of the room. There is a focal point--preferably a dominant architectural element that pulls everyone toward the same center.

- ❖ **BALANCE, FLOW, PROPORTION AND SCALE** – *Where* should we put the large pieces in the room to create balance, flow, proportion and scale? The room must be balanced from every angle (particularly the entries), and visual weight taken into consideration. The room should have managed and functional traffic flow that does not interrupt conversation but goes around the seating arrangement. Furniture pieces are in proportion to the room as a whole and to scale with one another

- ❖ **RHYTHM, REPETITION, STYLE AND LINES** - *Where* should we put the smaller pieces in the room to create rhythm, repetition, style and good lines? Is there repetition and rhythm to the room in the form of pairs of objects, colors, shapes, style and textures? Does this room have style? Is the room true to the style and integrity of the home? (Here is where redesign and staging purposes contrast, but ultimately, EVERY space should have great style.) Are there contrasting peaks and valleys in your sight line, or is there a pleasing flow? *Conversely, remove anything that does not fit your decorative purpose!*

- ❖ **OBLIGATIONS** - Rooms have plenty of lighting, are organized, clean, in good repair, and have good air circulation. For homeowners, these are obligations they owe themselves in order to relieve the stress, chaos, stuffiness and nagging mental "to do" list for each room. Sellers owe themselves these obligations in order to avoid getting "short changed" on the sale price of their home!

You'll notice that almost all these rules have something to do with the *Principles and Elements of Great Design*, and here is the cheat sheet as a reminder:

Principles of Good Design...

- Proportion
- Scale and Visual Weight
- Rhythm
- Balance
- Style
- Emphasis

Elements that Effect Those Principles...

- Arrangement – Space and Flow
- Color and Value
- Lines
- Texture
- Pattern
- Light



Note: When there are separate living and family rooms, tailor each rule to the formal/informal natures of the rooms to create those subtle living differences that help to reinforce each room's purpose.

PURPOSE

Who are we decorating for, and what is the purpose of the space to them?

For both homeowners and redesign, we need to take a close look at who lives in the home, what their needs are for the space, and what they love/dislike about the space. For buyers and staging, we need to examine who typically would be attracted to the neighborhood. Then, what would their needs be for the space and what do they typically like to see or not like to see in the space? See the difference? Let's tackle our redesign clients first, since they are a more complicated bunch.

The living family rooms are center stage for your redesign client's personal design sensibilities. Creating the ultimate livable space for your clients means combining comfort, function and flexibility with an imaginative design. The room's décor must serve a dual purpose: it must both welcome outsiders and provide a private, personalized space for the owner. This space absolutely needs to reveal the owner's personality through decorative display of all the things he/she/they love. It should showcase the owner's talents, interests, travels, passions, loves and history. Not only will this surround the owner with items of personal gratification, warmth, and significance; it will also offer guests a glimpse of the owner's life and style. While each room in the home should keep this personal maxim in mind, nowhere is it more imperative than in the living areas!

Your job as the Interior Stylist is to tap into what your client really needs in the space (function), their dislikes and loves, and the style they are most drawn to. With this knowledge, you can create an environment personalized and harmonious to them (form). Form follows function, so let's first assess what the client's purpose is for the room.

In almost all cases, living and family rooms should be designed for family gathering, entertaining and entertainment, as these are the emotional and practical purposes of the space. People need a space that offers a simple place for being together, and this is the modern day living room where relationships are developed. Problems arise emotionally when owners fill this space with items that don't suit the purpose, i.e. dusty treadmill (home gym), desk (makeshift office) or toys (extra playroom). Don't assume that your client needs this area for those other purposes, because many times it was a simple matter of convenience to place the items there.



Danger: When owners use living areas for purposes for which they were not intended, the home lacks an entertaining, gathering, family or tribal area. This is the most important purpose of the home, as it soothes the soul.

Below is an excellent example lifestyle questionnaire for the living areas that will help set the tone for the entire home. Remember, the living areas serve as style dictators, so this should help you get a read on your clients and exactly who you are decorating for.

Client Lifestyle Questionnaire for Living Areas

Who in your family primarily uses this room and for what purpose? _____

Do you entertain? _____ How often? _____ How many guests? _____

Casual or Formal? _____ Entertaining Notes: _____

Special Hobbies/Activities/Interests/Family Time:

What are your favorite pieces in your living areas and why? _____

Least favorite: _____

What do you like to do with your spare time? (Read, watch TV, play games?) _____

Style: (Circle answer that most applies)

What kind of surroundings makes you happy? A simple and airy space that feels like the beach or a cozy room filled with books and a comfortable chair?

Do you respond when neat and organized OR surrounded by lots of accessories?

Which is your favorite room in the house and why?

Which is your least favorite room in the house and why?

What do you consider your style? (Circle those that appeal and see *Home Style Sheets*)

Contemporary Traditional Rustic Lodge Old World Elegance Country French

Southwest Asian Modern Eclectic/Collected Pottery Barn Mediterranean

What mood do you want to create overall? (Circle those that apply)

Elegant/Formal Modern/Classic Sophisticated Worldly Casual/Relaxed

Lively/Bright Cool/Understated Cozy Spacious Welcoming Romantic

Do you have any magazine or book pictures that are favorite looks? _____

Please list favorite colors: _____

Colors you dislike: _____

Comments and Interior Visions to share:

Your Six Goals as the Designer and Stylist of the Space

Now that you have assessed the client's lifestyle and favorite things, as well as the primary function and style of the living areas, you can get to work! Translate the lifestyle questionnaire into a goal sheet for yourself as the designer. Here are some things to consider in translation:

- 1. Bring convenience to the function of the space** – If game playing is the primary function of a family room, make it easy for homeowners to access games by keeping a cupboard or chest in close proximity. If entertaining is your client's specialty, consider setting up a bar, which is a key ingredient in turning a living space into a sophisticated party space.
- 2. Bring comfort to the function of the space** – If, for instance, the family room is a place primarily for watching television, be sure that all seating has a clear view and is comfortable! If the owner likes to read, be sure to carve out a "special spot" in a quiet corner of the living room with plenty of lighting and a table for books and coffee.
- 3. Bring meaning into the form of the space by highlighting their favorite possessions** – Sometimes, too much of one thing is simply too much, so leave space around their favorite things so they will get noticed. Hang a favorite piece of art prominently over a fireplace or couch, or stack some favorite travel books neatly on a coffee table. Personally, my favorite piece in my living room is an antique screen that was a 30th birthday gift from my husband. I display it prominently as the first piece one sees when walking in the living room doors.
- 4. Bring emotion into the form of the space by incorporating as many of your client's personal possessions as you can without ruining the function or feel** – Surrounding your clients with personal mementos of love like photos, treasured books and accessories helps to bring warmth, life, personality, emotion and harmony to a space.
- 5. Bring emotion into the form of the space by incorporating a color scheme suitable to the feel your clients want, as well as the colors they prefer** – See our Color Design Module for details
- 6. Bring vision into the space by fulfilling some of your client's wish list for the function of the space** – Similar to staging, owners have a vision of what they want for their families, too! Sadly, too many of our rooms don't serve that vision. Brainstorm with your clients about what that vision looks like, and create an action list to help fulfill it for the present and in the future.

FOR STAGING

A different beast altogether when it comes to assessment question number one, staging means we are decorating to create a home the typical buyer for that neighborhood is looking for. Every neighborhood is different, so it's always a good idea to become familiar with who typically buys in an area. The best ways to ascertain that information are simply to ask the agent and look at the homeowner.



Note: According to the National Association of Realtors Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers, the typical home buyer is 39 years old with a median income of \$74,000.

Now that we know who is buying, let's talk about the typical *purposes* buyers want to see in a living room. We already know that living areas need to be places for family gatherings, conversation, entertaining and entertainment, so be sure the purposes of those rooms fit under those categories! The living room needs to be a living room - not an office, exercise room or play room. Buyers usually cannot envision other uses for a room besides current uses, and will write that room off.

If there are separate living and family rooms, try to keep the TV to just the family room and stage the living area as a more formal entertaining, sitting and reading room. Not all buyers actually entertain, BUT they ALL envision a lifestyle of entertaining...interesting isn't it? What people do and what they dream are different things. We want to create spaces that buyers can dream of or aspire to. The chart below helps you to creatively merchandise the differences and communicate them to your clients:

BUYER ASPIRATION CHEAT SHEET

Buyers Aspire to:	Buyers do not Aspire to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive things like paintings, wood, silver and glass • New and modern things that signify fresh and clean "updated décor" • Trends that are timeless • The good life of travel, entertaining friends, gourmet cooking, wine tasting, espresso drinking and a luxurious, leisurely lifestyle • Electronically savvy (<i>Think flat screens, surround sound and laptops</i>) • Light and Spacious surroundings • Harmonious and updated color combinations • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheap things like plastics, particle board or aluminum • Old and dated items that signify tired and dirty • Fads that are tiresome • The boring life of 8 to 5, dreary, plain, vanilla and uninspiring. (<i>Notice this is usually how many agents stage by getting rid of any traces of life or décor</i>) • Electronically last century (<i>Tube TV's, wires galore and big stereo speakers</i>) • Dark and cluttered spaces • Clashing, non-rhythmic, half-hearted color choices made on the fly •



Hands On Exercise – Grab one of your favorite home magazines and flip through the pages. Now, add some additional items to the above list to enhance your understanding of the importance of merchandising and marketing a VISION to buyers. This is tons of fun!

SPACE AND EMPHASIS

How is the space shaped and what should the focal point be?

While many redesign trainers advocate completely removing all the contents of a room in order to get an accurate read on the space and focal point, I don't. While that may be ideal, it's not very practical given that our time is money and that would take A LOT of time, not to mention where to put all the stuff for easy viewing! If you're a purist and are more comfortable clearing the space, be my guest. This is your business. For everyone else, when you approach each room, *imagine* a blank canvas and do the following:

- ❖ Walk to the entrance of the room and ask yourself what it is that you notice first. What is the architectural focal point? (fireplace, window, bookcase, entertainment center)
- ❖ What is the general shape of the floor of the room? (rectangle, square, oblong, L-shaped or odd angled)
- ❖ What is the shape of ceiling of each wall? (flat, pitched, cathedral)
- ❖ What are some notable architectural elements to highlight? (moldings, hardwood floors, French doors, high ceilings)

When you have the answers to these questions, it's easier to move to the next assessment step and begin placing the large pieces to create balance, flow and proportion.

Here's a reminder lesson on finding the focal point in the living areas:

In any room of the house, there should be one dramatic element that draws the eye's attention. This is the focal point. ***The focal point should be easily identified because usually it is the largest piece, and is linked to the prevailing purpose of the room.***

As much as possible, you will want your primary focal point to be a positive architectural feature of the room. This is especially true in regards to staging because buyers then know that that feature can be their highlighted focal point as well. If you're lucky, the focal point is a beautiful fireplace, a bay window with an incredible view, or a built-in cabinet. Typical living area focal points are a fireplace, large window, armoire or couch. The typical family room focal point is the TV, although I would encourage you to find a better *primary* focal point and have the TV as a secondary, near focal point, so that they don't compete.



Danger: Watch for competing focal points in a room. The most common are a large TV and a fireplace in a family room. Both have strong purpose and command our attention, so try to place them next to each other OR over each other.

Create a clear focal point, and if there must be a secondary, set them visually close to to each other if you can.

The Living Area's Focal Points

If there is a fireplace, it is the clear focal point every time in a living room, whether you like it or not. In the following examples, you'll see how to emphasize a great fireplace or distract attention from an unattractive one.

This formal living room has a perfect and comfortable living area. That fantastic fireplace is emphasized by arranging the furniture pieces on either side of the fireplace, facing each other.



In contrast to the example above, this room's fireplace is less than attractive. While we cannot remove this unsightly architectural feature, we certainly can distract from it using the largest and brightest picture the owner had on hand.

In both examples below, when there is not a fireplace, it's easy to create a focal point with a well-dressed couch and well-chosen artwork. The three pieces of art in the picture on the right are particularly creatively done as a focal point.



After finding the focal point, consider the shapes of the room's flooring and walls. Most living area shapes are easy to work with, because the process starts with assessing where the primary focal point is and building our large pieces around that.

However, here are some good guidelines to consider in regards to the shape of the floor and walls before moving furniture:

- ❖ For bowling alley (oblong) shaped rooms, consider ways to break up the space into two separate seating areas. For instance, if the focal point is centered on the long wall, place the main seating around it (couch opposite) and break up the far end by placing a separate seating area for two or small writing desk.
- ❖ For oblong living areas that also incorporate a formal dining area, try to define each space using area rugs over tile or hardwood.
- ❖ For L-shaped rooms, here are some ideas for the smaller portion of the "L": Create a separate two-seat conversation area or reading area, or place a writing desk or piano there.
- ❖ For square shaped rooms, which can be a bit boring visually, try angling the sofa or putting the sofa on the long wall and angling two club chairs adjacent to it for interest.
- ❖ For pitched walls, line up your sight-line pieces from shortest to tallest in conjunction with the ceiling. For cathedral walls, place the tallest piece under the tallest portion of the wall or peak.
- ❖ Never place pieces in front of windows or doorways where light and flow are meant to enter in. Make sure furniture is under the windowsills.

Now that you have determined whom you are decorating for, the architectural features you have to work with, and where the primary focal point is, you can determine where to place the furnishings, both big and small.

BEFORE you tackle placement, take a hard look at what the owner has, and do some "editing." Most people simply have too much. Many times, both sellers and owners have pieces they don't really like that were just left there because they haven't critically edited the room. That's okay. Now is the time to create space, eliminate chaos and allow visitors to notice the true beauty of what's left.

For both staging and redesign, it's important to get rid of those things that owners and buyers dislike. Go back to your Buyer Aspiration Cheat Sheet (for staging) and the Lifestyle Questionnaire (for redesign) and critically view each piece in the room.

1. Do you love it?
2. Does it fit with your Lifestyle Questionnaire or Buyers Cheat Sheet preferences?
3. For redesign: Has it been used within the past year? (Change the question to six months for staging.)

Three Steps to *Less Is More* and *Loving What You Have*

It's very difficult for people to really *see* the great stuff that you own when there is too much of it! Whether staging your home to sell or redesigning rooms for yourself, the maxim *less is more* almost always applies!

Getting rid of extra stuff is not as hard as it seems. In fact, there are plenty of places that would love to have it and will give you money for it! The Internet makes this very easy for you, as do local consignment shops of all varieties.

Here is my three-step process for finding good homes for your excess stuff while also "being Green":

1. First, grab three large plastic bins and two trash bags.
2. Label bin one as "Goodwill"; bin two as "Resell using Craigslist, Ebay or Consignment" (whichever is easiest for you to use); and bin 3 as "Storage." Label trash bag one as "Recycled Trash" (magazines, dog eared books, glass, etc.) and trash bag two as "Trash." I think by now you are getting the picture.
3. Now go through the room, asking yourself as you approach each item whether you love it or use it and whether it fits the style you envision and are trying to create for the home. If the item does not meet at least TWO of those qualifications, place it in its most appropriate bin. For those items that you love but only use once yearly, consider placing them in storage until they are needed.



Tip: If you're finding quite a few items in your storage bin, that's okay since it's hard to let go, and it's okay to change up the display items in a room from time-to-time. Try taking a seasonal approach to your accessories, pillows and throws. For instance, I love red in fall and winter holidays but quickly tire of this high energy color come spring. Same goes for the accents of gold and silver. What do I do? I use my gold and red during the fall and holiday period while changing them out to pale blues, navy and silver come spring and summer using only a hint of red. This way I get a new look to my rooms twice a year and get to keep all the things I dearly love but don't need. Needless to say, I have plenty of storage in my house to do this.

Craigslist.com, ebay.com and your various local consignment stores would be happy to sell your more valuable but needless items for you. A garage sale takes time and energy while these online options are fairly painless. Let's face it, how many valuable pieces do you really have in your bin?

Consider simply giving those items to those who need them. Craigslist even has a fun, free section where you can place stuff you don't want for free--believe me, someone will pick these items up at your house shortly. Amvets has an easy pickup service for most states where you can leave your stuff out front and they will pick it up. Simply go to: <http://www.amvetsnsf.org/stores.html> for your local pickup phone number. Goodwill is another favorite because it uses all your stuff to create jobs for people in your area.



Tip: Be sure to dispose of old electronic equipment, computers, refrigerators or large appliances properly. Call your city to see where each piece is best recycled and handled. As stagers and redesigners, it's a great idea to have a ready resource on hand for this. It is the first step to green staging and redesign.

FOR STAGING – BIG AND SMALL PIECE RULES OF THUMB

When you're decorating your home to sell, there are some pieces that will hinder the sale and make it difficult for buyers to envision themselves living there. Those items should be discarded and packed away immediately!

Here is a list of things buyers don't want to see and those which distract them:

- ❖ Small TV's or oversize TV's in the TV room. A small TV is a "buyer red flag" and leaves buyers wondering where they would put their larger one. A large TV distracts buyers' attention away from anything attractive in the room.
- ❖ Collections of any kind only serve to distract, so tame them down to three of various heights if they are generic enough (see Arrangement Module), or remove them altogether.
- ❖ Remove all flimsy magazines, newspapers, mail and excess from table surfaces. Expensive magazines like Architectural Digest are okay as they fit within our Buyers Aspiration Cheat Sheet.
- ❖ Remove dead or unhealthy plants
- ❖ Remove bright furniture or carpets, especially anything that is worn or outdated.
- ❖ Remove entertainment center clutter like CD's, DVD's or small electronics that you can do without.
- ❖ Remove family photos, religious mementos, political, sexual or racy matter that would serve to profile the seller.
- ❖ Remove all paperback books and remove the jackets on nicer hardback books in order to dress them up. Again, be sure the book collection is classic (generic) and does not indicate a profile of any kind (religious, political, controversial or sexual).
- ❖ Remove coasters, photo albums, remotes and tiny stuff on table tops that does not fit our Arrangement Module.
- ❖ Remove heavy, light-blocking or outdated drapes. Bare windows are preferable to old, cheap or outdated window coverings. Metal blinds are very unpopular and can make a home look cheap and outdated. Silhouettes in fabric or simple panels are very popular and help to add a lot of light to a room.
- ❖ Remove any broken, worn, damaged, stained or outdated furniture or accessories.
- ❖ Remove tiny rugs, which only break up the flow and the flooring.

BALANCE, FLOW, PROPORTION AND SCALE

Where should we put the large pieces of the room to create balance, flow proportion and scale?

It makes sense to position the large items first. I'm sure you've noticed that, by placing those five large pieces, you have controlled the traffic flow and balance of the room. You've also set the tone for proportion and scale, because every other adjoining piece needs to fit the perspective and size determined by the large pieces. Trust me, you'll see. Since the purpose of both the living and family areas are centered on seating and conversation, it makes sense to position your couch and TV first (if this is the TV room).



Note: If you have a large armoire or piano, you'll want to place those before placing the couch, since there are usually few options of placement for those oversized items. Keep in mind that those pieces will serve to balance the room, so if you have a large armoire, place it across from the fireplace. This is usually where the peak of the wall is highest, so the problems of balance and wall shape are both solved at once. If that's not possible, try placing them in one of the corners, diagonally from the fireplace, without blocking flow.



Tip: Always hire professionals to move a piano because of the fragile nature of the instrument and the need to retune it afterward if it is moved badly.

Here are some furniture arranging reminders learned in our *Arranging Module*:

TRAFFIC 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. The arrangement of doors in my own home is very often found in many living rooms--it's what I call the diagonal traffic pattern. It invariably collides 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 allow as little as 12 inches, but no more.

Placing Your Pieces – A Few Rules to Follow

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 scaled 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.
- ❖ There must be appropriate reading light for the seating arrangements.
- ❖ There must be a place near each seat to put a glass or a 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 axis points hit. This should tighten your conversation area to comply with the 8 foot rule.
- ❖ Likewise, in a large room you can "float" the furniture and create groupings around the main conversation area. Just be leery of lighting issues since cords cannot cross a traffic path.
- ❖ In staging, especially, do not crowd the entrance with furniture. Create long sight lines so that people can have a view of the entire room from the doorway.
- ❖ In square-shaped rooms, try to angle the seating arrangement for interest when staging.

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, which gives us MANY possible seating scenarios.



Tip: Try the furniture in different formations to find the right fit. Remember this is an art form, not a science, so being able to visualize the different arrangements will help your final decision.

Visual Living Area Furniture Arrangements Based on Focal Points

Consider how the space is used and cast your couch accordingly. For instance, if there is a separate family room, then it makes sense to place the TV first and preferably next to the primary focal point (see above).



Long sofa and loveseat - 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 as in the picture where the focal point is the TV built-in.

Couch and Two Chairs

- Ideally, if the entrance to the room is anywhere but facing the focal point, it's good to place the couch facing the focal point and the two chairs on either side in a U-configuration.

The example right, is why the U-shaped rule would not work when the entrance faces the focal point. 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.



Visual Living Area Furniture Arrangements Based on Focal Points Continued



Sectionals – Sectionals work in very large rooms because they match the scale of the room which is one of our fundamental rules. Use the same rules with the sectional as you would a sofa and loveseat in a room. If the room is not big enough for the sectional, by all means break it up. <<< Notice that the eye is brought up to the colorful prints and matching pillows as the oversize piece fades to background because of its neutrality? That's why I love a neutral couch as it provides so much versatility!

Couch and Two Chairs with Pitched Ceiling and Square Room –

Sticking with the entrance facing a fantastic focal point, the couch and two chairs usher the view in. Notice that the pitched ceiling architectural detail is highlighted through the use of similarly angled drapery rods and high centered painting?

I love how interest was created in this square shaped room by simply angling the chairs. I prefer angled chairs for interest, rather than an angled couch which many times only creates a lopsided effect to the room.



RHYTHM, REPETITION, STYLE AND LINES

Where should we place the smaller pieces in the room to create rhythm, repetition, style and good lines?

Now that we've placed the large pieces in the room, we can think about the smaller pieces like tables, plants, screens, accent chairs, desks or hutches. Our scale has already been set by the large pieces, so any secondary piece that doesn't fit that scale should go. Can you imagine placing a Pier One diminutive coffee table next to an oversized sectional? Some furniture stores like Pier One, Ikea and Cost Plus sell smaller scale furniture meant for smaller rooms and apartments, while most other furniture companies sell standard-sized furniture. If you're struggling with finding pieces to match the scale of your large pieces, consider using a bedroom nightstand or entry table for compatibility.



Note: You have the whole home to shop for perfect pieces for the living areas, as they take precedence over any other room. This is the great benefit of what you do! You have the design ability to look at the home as a whole with movable parts, whereas most owners and sellers limit their choices and decorating to a room-by-room approach, not realizing that they have a warehouse of resources at their disposal!

Here are some rules to consider when placing your finishing pieces:

- ❖ Be sure to place side tables next to seating so there is no more than a 2-inch height difference between the tabletop and the arms of the couch or chair.
- ❖ Make sure that the coffee table is at least 10 inches away from the seating, yet no more than 22 inches away, so that it's within arm's reach.
- ❖ Make sure that each piece has appropriate breathing room but is not isolated.
- ❖ Use the whole space and tighten your grouping if the balance in the center of the room feels light.
- ❖ Place like with like for repetition and to avoid too much contrast. For instance, don't place a light pine side table next to a dark, rich ebony shelf.
- ❖ Intersperse elements in pairs and in like finishes, colors, textures and textiles around the room.
- ❖ Go green and use large, healthy plants or trees to soften elements and areas that are "hard."
- ❖ Use natural elements like wood, shells, fur, basket weave, branches, flowers, sand, rocks and plants to add life and bring the outside into the room. Nothing works better than natural, organic elements to soothe the soul.
- ❖ Stick with the Buyers Aspiration card for accessory choices and use symmetry (see *Elements of Design Module*) to add harmony.

A Word about Fireplace Mantels

Since the fireplace is usually the natural focal point of any room, be sure it passes the Lifestyle Questionnaire and Buyers Aspiration Cheat Sheet. The fireplace should be clean, in good repair and ready to roll. Be sure the accessories are to scale with the fireplace (not wider) and not cluttered looking. Also, fireplace mantels give us plenty of opportunity to create symmetry, repetition and style, so take advantage of the focal point's shelf and use it to highlight the owner's favorite things or "buyer's aspiration" pieces. See the fireplaces below:



<<<The framed art placed vertically highlights the high ceilings of this room. The repetition in framing materials and candles helps to create rhythm and harmony with the accessories.

It's a very easy thing to place art on a mantel rather than hang it. If you are thinking about hanging art, make sure to center it between the ceiling and top of fireplace and then drop it a few inches depending upon space given. 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-just use your fingers) 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!



>>>

In a redesign, placing cherished photos in frames of similar finish and size looks beautiful on a mantel, personalizes the space wonderfully and gives visitors a glimpse of family life. Notice the symmetry in placement? While I'm not a fan of mirrors on a mantel, in this case, as "background" it helps to add height.

A Reminder Word about Accessorizing Coffee Tables and Side Tables

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 goal is always to keep our design principles in mind and then to use art and accessories as tools to express the personality of the owner (redesign) or to modernize and update the room (staging). In staging, I refer to accessories and artwork as small investments in the modernization of a home, because the details are what 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; 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 pointed out what you should do, let me tell you what you shouldn't do...

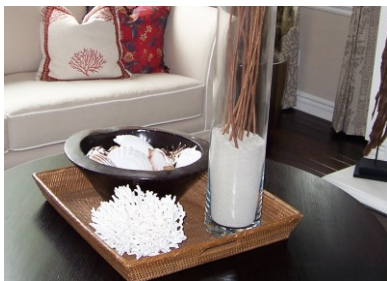


Danger:

- 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 so that they block conversation or the view of a seated guest



Tip: Consider anchoring your accessory groupings by using staging trays, runners, placemats, thin throws or frames (see below). Notice all of the organic materials used?



A Word about Creating “Special Spots”

For both staging and redesign, people generally long for that special chair where they can curl up and read or nap. A quiet spot surrounded by the things they love serves as a haven in their home. In fact, each member of the family (including Fido) should have his or her own special place to take a “time-out” and de-stress. Here are some excellent examples:



OBLIGATIONS

Well-staged or -designed rooms have plenty of lighting, are well organized, clean, repaired and have good air circulation.

These are just plain necessities in any room! When we let our rooms go, we are creating more stress in our lives than we can imagine. We are also letting chaos reign, which in turn affects every other part of our lives, making us feel out of control. In terms of staging, presenting rooms which are clean and in good repair is imperative in order to get the best price for the home. Most buyers do not want to see any sign of dust, hair, dirt or stains. Do not let a simple thing like carpet stain turn off a potential buyer. A successfully staged home will sparkle, which in turn gives buyers the impression that this product was well taken care of!

We highly recommend bringing a cleaning service into your home for heavy, deep cleaning BEFORE the home is staged. It's hard to be objective about dust and dirt because we get used to seeing it at times. Paying the extra money for professional cleaning reaps huge rewards. For redesign, it's a good idea to do this once a year during your spring cleaning time. Here is a checklist of sorts to consider as you walk through the living areas:

- ☑ Let there be light! Windows should be sparkling clean. Old screens should just be removed and stored in the garage.
- ☑ Got pets? Professionally clean and deodorize carpeting, furniture, drapes and rugs. This should greatly help to eliminate any smoke residue, pet odors or mustiness.
- ☑ Got wood? Clean and wax your wood using a mix of Murphy Oil Soap with hot water to clean all woodwork such as, front doors, floors, cabinets and tables. Use Howard's Wax to give all the wood a great shine.
- ☑ Clean and polish all lighting fixtures to a sparkle.
- ☑ Clean the inside and outside of your fireplaces. Polish fireplace tools and wax the wood mantel. IF you have black soot on the firewall, use Krud Kutter to remove it. *Hint – The fireplace is usually the focal point, so making sure it is super clean is imperative!
- ☑ Consider changing out your light switch plates, since these easily become dirty over time from fingerprints and cost next to nothing to purchase.
- ☑ Clean any scuffs on the walls, plastic surfaces or vinyl using Mr. Clean Magic Eraser.
- ☑ Use a hairdryer to remove dust from fake plant leaves and then spray them with Pledge to keep them from getting covered with dust.

Look around the room with fresh eyes and see if you find anything that needs repairing, refinishing, touch-up or TLC. Buyers notice these things right away, and if their mental "to do list" gets too long, no offer will be coming. In terms of living in the space, researchers have found that it's the small, repeated irritants that provide the most stress in our lives, so be sure to DO your To Do list—don't risk a lot of extra stress!