

# Warm up your living space with these FURNITURE PLACEMENT TIPS

BY ADENE LUCAS



WE ALL WANT OUR HOMES TO LOOK beautiful and feel warm and inviting and the way a room feels has a lot to do with furniture placement. If a sofa is shoved against a wall and the occasional chairs are spaced too far apart, or the furniture is placed awkwardly, the room will feel cold and uninviting. It is similar to meeting a person with their arms crossed and back to the wall, not very approachable or friendly.

In general, individuals or families have a room that needs to serve a few purposes, as well as incorporating furniture that was inherited or combined with a spouse. This is when furniture placement can get tricky. Gone are the days when the “guest” living room sat in pristine condition and was never used unless it was holiday when the invisible rope was moved aside. In today’s homes, spaces are used and rooms need to be functional, yet attractive. Life would be so much easier if every time we moved, we could start from scratch and get new pieces that perfectly suited the new space. Placement would never be an issue, however life can get complicated, rooms are not all square, corner fireplaces exist and furniture that was once purchased for a condo now sits in your grand living room.

When deciding the furniture layout of a room, there are a few things you may want to look at first before placing the furniture and hanging the art.

To start with, how is the room going to be used? If the primary use is for watching television, then the furniture should be placed with that intent. The same applies if the room is used for company and visiting. Furniture pieces should be no more than eight feet apart; this spacing creates an intimate feel in the room and easily lends itself to conversation. Did you ever attend a house party where two people are engrossed in conversation, sitting closely in occasional chairs? Closeness in proximity fosters easy communication. If furniture is spaced too far apart it can have a waiting room feel to it. When working with a very large room try breaking the space up by creating two separate seating areas. Create one conversation area with chairs facing the sofa and a lounging space with two chairs side by side with an oversized ottoman in front for propping your feet on. Using a sofa table between spaces creates a bit of separation in the same room.

Typically, too much space is not the issue, it more likely that space is limited. There is





one main room that serves for movie watching, entertaining, visiting, and perhaps reading the odd book when time permits. Keeping that in mind, one also needs to consider the structure of the room. Are there great views, or architectural elements that need to be highlighted? What are the focal points, a television, a fireplace or a classic piece of furniture? Are there natural traffic patterns in the space? For example, do you use one room as a pathway to another room? If so, furniture should not be placed in this area. Try to leave a walkway of one to four feet so that the room feels open and not cramped. The room may measure 12' x 10', but in actual fact it becomes a 10' x 10' room if you consider the traffic patterns of the space. Furniture should never be placed so that it becomes an obstacle. A room should flow and be accessible from a few points for easy entry in and out. The way furniture is placed can have an impact on whether the room is used. Consider a dining room for example; the adjoining living room has a sofa which has its back to the dining room. The placement of the sofa now acts as barrier to the room. By using two chairs on a 45 degree angle as opposed to the sofa, the room will appear softer and more inviting, even though the access point is the same.

Now that a few guidelines have been established, it's time to remove all the furniture from the space and start fresh. If visualization is a hurdle, measure the pieces you are going to use and put painter's tape on the floor in the correct dimensions, stand back and see how the room looks. If you still have trouble deciding take a picture and then look at the room.

Begin with the largest piece, or the furniture you will use most. In a bedroom, place the bed first and place everything else after. In the living area place the sofa first, entertainment unit or another item that you want to highlight. Larger pieces look better placed evenly throughout the room. When deciding what should go where, think balance. If all the heavier, larger furniture is on one side, the room will appear lopsided. Space out the furnishings and don't be too concerned with heights. Varying heights keep things interesting; however you want the movement between pieces to be gradual. For example, placing your classic armoire next to a dainty chair is not the best look. The chair will give the impression of being dwarfed and the armoire will look imposing.



### CONSIDER THE BALANCE OF A SPACE AS WELL WHEN DECIDING ON LAYOUT

Balance can be informal or asymmetrical, using large items with smaller items. Or it can be formal, or symmetrical, when the room is a mirror image. I find that people gravitate strongly towards one or the other. If you are an individual that likes a very polished room, formal balance is your style. It is a simple, timeless approach and whatever you do on one side of the room you do on the other. If you are a collector of interesting items and are very eclectic, informal is a better way to arrange furniture and will highlight your unique sense of style.

Once the larger items have been placed, its time to think in terms of grouping or vignettes. An occasional chair with a small table and lamp is a nice soft grouping. Furniture that stands alone may look lost in a space or uninviting. If you feel that something is missing try looking around your home and repurpose a piece. For example an old blanket chest could be a coffee table; a unique set of drawers could be used as a hutch or an end table. Sometimes you may need to buy an odd piece such as a floor lamp or an area rug to unify the space and bring the room together.

As with any decorating, just have fun with it. Try different things, play with the layout or find one that sticks and leave it. If you find that you're bored with the look that works add new toss cushions or change up the accessories, not the entire room. Also remember that negative space, despite the name is actually a good thing. Rooms do not need to have every wall and floor spaced covered. If you are still unsure if the room has come together and the placement is correct, you will know based on whether or not the room is used. Simply put, a well thought-out room will get used.



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