



# UNIT- 4 Room Elements

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss different aspects of lighting schemes
- ✓ Explore various treatments for walls and ceilings
- ✓ Describe the need for suitable flooring for the room

## Unit 4

### Room Elements

#### Lighting

When planning a home, rooms should be allocated according to the amount of natural light they receive, as well as other practical considerations. The traditional artists' studio, for example, had a large north facing window, so that the painter had as much pure and cool light as possible to avoid distorting colours on the canvas. Morning light is brighter and clearer than afternoon or evening light, which has a mellower, yellowish cast. By contrast, warm evening light will be comfortable and relaxing for a night-time sitting room. But as the day wears on, natural light fades, and we need more artificial light to continue our activities.

There is an enormous range of artificial lighting products available today, and we need to plan lighting for a scheme just as carefully as for any other structure or service in the home. The goal being to ensure it becomes an integral part of the whole environment. You will have to plan the direction, strength and type of lighting that will be required in a room, where the cables would be sited, where the light fittings and sockets will be placed - all these things are as important as any other feature when planning a design scheme. Light, like colour, can create both mood and atmosphere in a room, and therefore should be planned very carefully. It has the ability to dazzle, enhance, dim or brighten any space. Light and colour are closely linked; the amount of light a colour receives can change its appearance subtly, so the two should always be considered very carefully.

Light has a major impact on our enjoyment of a room. Good lighting can alter the apparent size of a room, enhance its best features and diminish less desirable ones. Natural light contributes greatly to a sense of wellbeing, but it is rarely enough on its own. Both natural and artificial lights affect colour, and must be taken into account when choosing the decoration for a room.

#### Natural lights

Daylight alters in intensity from season to season, and even from hour to hour. It changes in colour from the clear light of the early morning to the lavender glow of dusk; and from burnished golden light of high summer to the white dazzle of winter. With the change in the intensity of light, the interior of the building also seems different. Therefore, it is useful to see a room in as many changing lights as possible, before choosing a colour scheme and furnishings for it.

There are several factors to consider with natural light. First, decide if there is sufficient light in the room for its intended use. For example, if the kitchen is to be the hub of the household at all hours of the day, then it should be a room with lots of natural light. Consider also how light changes during the day and how it falls in different areas of the room. Dark corners may need a subtle boost of artificial light.

If the amount of natural light is not enough for how you want to use the room, you have two options. You can explore ways of bringing in more natural light, perhaps by adding another window or by changing the solid doors to glass ones. Otherwise, you can boost the existing daylight with artificial light. In that, case you will have to plan the right lighting scheme.

## Light through Glass

Glass is another light producer. Glass topped tables on metal legs give the appearance of floating, which helps to increase a feeling of spaciousness. Glass shelves, lit from above or below, and perhaps used to display a collection of coloured glass or plants, will effectively increase light and reflect any sunlight that comes in through the windows. Stained glass windows or doors also create interesting coloured shadows when light shines through them.

## Adapting Windows

If structural alterations have been planned for a home, special consideration should be given to increase the amount of light by replacing existing windows with the larger ones, and by installing energy-saving double or triple glazing at the same time. Picture windows and sliding patio doors are particularly effective ways of bringing daylight into the home, but bear in mind the architectural features of the property.

The positioning of the home also affects the amount of natural light available. South facing rooms receive full light, East facing rooms will face light from the rising sun, West facing rooms light from the setting sun and North or North East facing rooms will not receive much direct light.

## Light Enhancers

The use of beautiful colours, light reflecting textures and clear space encourages a sense of lightness. Light reflecting objects such as crystals or mirrors can be strategically placed to enhance light, boost energy levels and direct energy around the house. By day, mirrors will reflect natural light, and by night, they will reflect light from the candles or lamps.

## Planning a Lighting Scheme

A well-planned lighting scheme not only makes a room more generally pleasing, but it is very important - whether you write letters, cook or apply makeup - all these tasks will be helped if undertaken in appropriate lighting conditions. Once the furniture is shown on the plan, we can see exactly how many light points, circuits and sockets will be needed, and their best positions. There are many considerations to keep in mind when planning a lighting scheme for a room, including the following:

### Activities

What will be happening in the room and where? What type of lighting would be most appropriate?

### Balance of Light throughout the Day

Have you ensured that there are no dark areas?

### Highlighting of Features

What about the stunning pictures, the magnificent marble fireplace or the beautifully beamed ceiling? Are they all bathed in light and shown off to their best advantage?

### **Flexibility**

What of future room changes? Do you have enough free-standing light fittings that can be repositioned to provide new functions?

### **Decorative Style**

Does the selection of fittings compliment the room, or do they clash with the decorations?

### **Ambience**

Decorative or reflective? The choice is yours.

### **Overall Light Level**

How many fittings would be required to achieve a good overall level of light?

### **Variety**

A scheme composed of all the same type of fitting can be boring and is unlikely to satisfy all the room's requirements. Be imaginative in your selection.

## **Types of Light**

Well planned interior lighting incorporates multiple layers of light. There are three main layers of lighting:

- Ambient
- Task
- Accent

### **Ambient lighting**

Ambient is the overall lighting of a room, from the sun's rays streaming through the window to an overhead fixture providing primary illumination. Examples of ambient light include lamps placed around the room, overhead lighting and ceiling mounted lighting fixtures. Other examples of ambient lighting include:

- Pendants lights
- Torchieres
- Suspended up-lights

### **Task Lighting**

Task lighting is used to illuminate a specific area for a more practical reason: reading, for example. A desk lamp to light a table and an under-cabinet light used to illuminate a kitchen counter would be examples of this type of interior

lighting. Other examples of task lighting include:

- Swing arm lamps
- Wall sconces
- Adjustable floor lamps

## Accent lighting

Accent lighting provides a way to focus attention on architectural or decorative aspects of a room. An illuminated wall niche or spotlights focused on a painting draw your eyes to these features. Track lighting or recessed 'eyeball' style lighting can be used to illuminate interesting wall features, or simply provide a wash of light across the painted surface. A wall wash can be very dramatic in itself.

## Types of Bulbs

### Halogen

This is the whitest of all lights and has a cooling effect. It can be a great choice for utilitarian task lighting. It is good for the kitchen and for home office.

### Tungsten

The tungsten filament bulb is the most common domestic light source. Compared with daylight, tungsten has a warm, yellowish tone and is good for interior use because it does not alter colour relationships severely. It also provides a good tonal contrast. Tungsten bulbs come in various wattages and designs, and therefore suit different kinds of fixtures. Tungsten bulbs have a relatively short life - they also generate a lot of heat.

### Fluorescent

Fluorescent light is long-lasting and efficient, and therefore is less costly to run than tungsten.

## Selecting the Right Fittings

Once you have established your lighting aims, it is time to choose the fittings that will help you achieve your plan. The most important thing to remember when settling on a style of lighting is that the performance of a particular fitting should be considered first and foremost, rather than the decorative value of the lamp itself. Another issue to be addressed is whether or not it is acceptable to mix lighting styles within the same room. Can modern fittings be introduced into a traditional interior? The answer depends very much on your own preference. Generally speaking, if the modern fittings are placed in the ceiling, these will not conflict with older elements in the room.

A point frequently ignored while planning light levels is the effect of the chosen colour scheme. A predominantly pastel scheme (with white walls and ceilings) and one with shiny surfaces will need less light wattage, as light is reflected off the various surfaces than the darker scheme or one which has matt surfaces, where the light is absorbed. In the case of the darker scheme, you may need to *double* the wattage or number of fittings.

Choice of light fittings depends upon the room, personal taste, room style and colour, how much light is required and

for which purposes it is required. In practice, most rooms need a mixture of light fittings.

## Pendants and Chandeliers

### Pendant

Light suspended from the ceiling by a pipe or chain.



### Chandelier

A branched light fixture suspended from the ceiling that holds multiple bulbs.



Pendants and chandeliers both provide general or background lighting. Usually suspended centrally from the ceiling, they can generate a dull and unflattering light, leaving room corners in darkness. Some pendants are designed for use over dining tables. Glass chandeliers are particularly elegant. Originally, they were all candle powered, but when converted to electricity the light can be harsh. Therefore, low wattage bulbs should be used and they should be hung in the centre of the room.

## Source

A light fixture attached to the wall.

### Task Lamp

This is a lamp with a moveable arm and head that can be adjusted to focus on a task.



## Track

Individual fixtures called 'heads' can be positioned anywhere along a track.



## Wall Lights

Wall lights take the form of traditional bracket, up lighter, down lighter, picture light, strip light or angle–arm lights.

Modern or traditional, they can be chosen to throw light up, down or out. The question is - what is the best height for positioning wall lights? Generally, around 1.5m (or 5ft) is a good starting point.

## Floor/Table lamps

The floor/table lamp category covers such fittings as standard lamp, uplighter, table lamp, desk lamp and angle -poise. As these lights are not fixed to the floor, wall or ceiling, they offer the greatest degree of flexibility.

## Modern Fittings

Lighting has undergone a revolution in the past twenty years. The basic grouping is listed below:

### Down Lighters

Down lighters direct the beam of light downwards. The width of the beam of light depends on the lamp and reflector installed.



## Up lighters

Up lighters can come in the form of free-standing models for floors or tables, as well as pendant and wall-fixed versions. They are especially effective when used to illuminate a beautiful beamed or decorative ceiling. |



## Wall washers

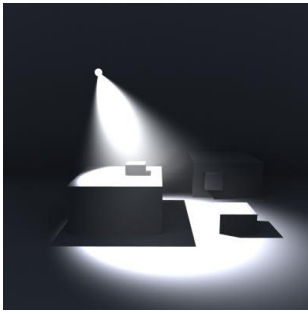
A wall washer is the type of down lighter, which instead of directing light immediately below the fittings casts a beam of light to the side.



## Spotlights

The spotlights are highly directional and allow you to change your lighting arrangement as the room use changes.

Some lights combine several functions. For example, table lamps are useful task lights and they lend atmosphere to a room. Spotlights can be used for either task or display lighting as needed.



One of the simplest lighting features is a dimmer switch, which will give you the option to instantly change from bright illumination to subtle mood lighting as the occasion demands.

Most rooms need a mixture of task and ambient lighting, and of overhead and lower-level lights. Avoid too much bright overhead light as it will not create a relaxing environment. Essentially, you should aim to create several layers of light in each room: the more layers, the more ways there are of lighting the space, and so of changing activity and mood.

When selecting the lights, ensure that the lights themselves suit the style of the room.

Decide whether the room requires additional sockets for table lamps, or whether cabling needs to be installed for wall lights. Such tasks should be carried out by an electrician before you decorate.

## Directing Light

### Up light

It projects light up a wall or towards the ceiling. It gives the illusion of more space. Examples: a sconce pointed upwards, a pendant with an up turned bowl.

### Down light

The light is projected towards the lower part of the room. This can be direct or semi-direct, i.e. a pendant with a down turned bulb.

### Diffused Light

Light is dispersed throughout the room, making it work for ambient light, i.e. a paper lantern or a flush globe fixture.

### Multidirectional Light

Light is directed in many directions for a combination of lighting, i.e. a multi head track light.

## Creating a Lighting Scheme

### Mix it up

A harmonious lighting scheme can be created by mixing a variety of sources. Combining different fixtures brings much-needed comfort and ambience, and the alternating levels of light allow the eye to adjust to the changing times of the day.

### Take control

It is best to keep artificial ambient light on dimmer controls, to be adjusted as the sun rises and sets. Accent and task lighting can be combined to create a dramatic effect.

### Space it out

Distribute the light. If a room can be lit with a single 100 watt bulb, consider spacing bulbs of lower wattage around the room.

## Room By Room Lighting

### Halls Stairs and Landings

These areas need to be brightly lit, both for safety and to create a welcoming atmosphere. Stairs should be well lit to make the treads clearly visible. A dual switch is advisable for linking the hall and landing. Light at the landing area can be on dimmer switch, which can be kept on at a low level for young children. Tables, desks or telephone areas should have separate task lighting. Wall washers can be used to highlight any architectural features or wall hangings. If the hall is long and narrow, use mirrors to reflect light – maybe hang an eye-catching item on a narrow wall and illuminate it dramatically.

### Living Areas

Living areas can play host to multiple separate function areas. In which case, the individual areas will need appropriate light according to their different functions. Provide soft general background lighting, possibly using a dimmer switch. Use task lighting for reading and play areas, or for any desk area. Use accent light or display lighting to enhance any interesting architectural features.

### Dining Room

Provide a soft background glow using integral lighting. Light the dining table clearly, avoiding any glare. You may choose an overhead lighting source, perhaps a pendant, which can be raised or lowered according to what is required. Do not use an overly powerful light. Candlelight on a dining table brings both light and atmosphere. Food serving areas should be well lit, perhaps with wall lights or lamps which can be switched off, or dimmed once the meal is in progress. Use spotlights to highlight special features, like paintings and beautiful objects. If part of the room has to be used as a study, also use task lighting.

## **Kitchens**

The kitchen needs good lighting as it is the main 'workroom' of the house. Soft background lighting should also be provided, along with good task lighting. Accent and display lighting should focus on the dresser. Clear and direct lighting is extremely important in the kitchen. Work surfaces and cookers should be well lit from above. As sinks are often placed under the window, they receive good natural light during the day. At night they, too need an extra light source. Eating areas in the kitchen need to be well lit, and for this purpose integral lighting can be installed.

## **Bedrooms**

The type of lighting needed will be influenced by the way the room is used. Use night lighting in children's bedrooms and task lighting in teenagers' rooms. Bedrooms also need soft background lighting, conveniently controlled from doors and beds. Bedside lighting can be wall mounted or an integral part of the bed head, so that it can shine onto the pages of the book when sitting up in bed. Bedside lights should be used for reading rather than down lighters, which can have an undesirable effect if they pour light onto the reader's head.

The dressing table area will need good task lighting. If television is watched in bed, or there is a computer in the room, avoid any light which will cause glare on the screen.

## **Bathrooms**

Safety is of prime importance in the bathroom again. Do not mix water and electricity under any circumstances. Lights should be switched off by a pull cord system, or with switches sited *outside* the bathroom door. Fittings should be covered by glass or plastic, so that metal parts are unaffected by steam. Spotlights, down lighters and up lighters are suitable for using in the bathroom. Light mirrors or the dressing table area with a clear light that shines on the face - not on the mirror. Light bath, basin and shower areas well but without dazzle. Shiny surfaces can give off glare, so proceed with caution.

## **Play and Game Rooms**

These rooms need good background lighting plus some accent or display lighting. Task lighting is an important feature and depends entirely on how the room is used. Reading, play and games areas should be well lit. Billiards, table tennis and pool tables call for special table lighting.

## **Conservatories**

Low voltage lighting is particularly good for conservatories, because it does not become too hot.

## **Garden**

Garden or outdoor lighting is also important to plan properly. It can be used to emphasize plants, shrubs, trees and architectural features, creating a close link between the home and the garden. The front door and entrance should be well lit, using lighting that highlights any changes in floor level (steps). To enhance attractive outdoor features, use spotlights or down lighters. All artificial outdoor lighting should be controlled from inside the house, or it can be dual switched or fixed to an automated timer.

## Walls and Ceilings

Walls and ceilings are the largest planes of a room. Because of their dominating proportions, they must be considered with care. Each must be thought about carefully - not individually, but in relation to the whole room. Together, these surfaces form the canvas upon which you will introduce other colours, patterns and textures.

The decisions you make about these surfaces relate back to your initial decisions about the room. How you want to use it, the quality and amount of space and light, the style and colours you choose and so on. Another key factor is the budget. Whereas painted walls and ceilings are relatively inexpensive to work with, a floor is a costly item to change.

In simple terms, the main decision to be made about surfaces is whether to draw attention to them or to use them as a backdrop. This, in turn, will show how decorative they should be. The amount of colour or pattern you introduce onto them will have a direct influence on the complexity of the decorative scheme. If in doubt, keep surfaces as neutral and plain as possible: then there will be plenty of scope for introducing layers of decoration later, through the use of furniture, textiles, lighting and accessories.

Doors, windows, skirting boards, cornices and fixtures such as radiators must be considered along with these large expanses. Although they are proportionally smaller, they play a vital role in defining the perimeters of the room.

### Walls

When choosing wall coverings, decide whether you want the walls to recede into the background or whether they should have more impact in the scheme. This will guide you towards neutrals and plain colours on the one hand, or patterns and stronger colours on the other hand. It is also important to consider what will go against the wall. If you have paintings, fixtures, and imposing pieces of furniture, they must sit comfortably with the wall colour. For example, rich wooden antiques, decorative collections and traditional oil and watercolour paintings look effective against deep, strong colours. Think of forest green and vermilion red; these are found in many art galleries. You will also need to decide how to light such pieces and which type of lights will be installed before decorating.

Pieces with more textural beauty - such as shells or a collection of fossils - can be placed against a pale, slightly distressed surface to bring out their aesthetic qualities.

If what is going on or against the wall is not the issue, then the decorative treatment comes back to personal choice: paint or paper, colour or neutral, smooth or textured.



## **Finding Your Own Theme**

A practice called “theming” is another way of co-ordinating a room’s décor. In this case, the style of a room is produced by using wall coverings with a dominant motif or theme, enhanced with an accentuating border, and then with related accessories. Usually, the theme reflects the owner’s interests. Though the choice of styles or themes is endless, some popular styles include Asian or international, Victorian, country, eclectic, etc.

## **Architectural Features**

Architectural features can either be a prominent part of the decorative scheme or play a very small role. If you have chosen the second option, use white or off white to paint door frames and skirting boards. If you do not want to hide these features, they can be used to add colour and contrast to an interior. Painting doors and windows the same colour as the skirting board helps to unify a scheme. To define these features while ensuring they harmonize with the walls, paint them two shades darker than the wall colour. Give architectural features as much thought as the rest of the scheme.

## **Decorative Options**

For decoration the first thing decision is between paint, plain plaster, paper, fabric, mirrors or panelling for the walls and ceilings. The second task is to consider the extent of all these options.

## **Spatial Effects**

Already mentioned in connection with colour, what you choose to decorate the walls and ceilings can make a significant difference. Not just to a room’s character, but also to its perceived proportions and style. In fact, the clever use of pattern, texture and architectural details, as well as colour, can make a room look smaller or longer, wider or narrower, cooler or warmer, lighter or darker. It can also disguise problem areas.

The actual space can also be altered through structural changes, such as adding walls or taking them away. In the same way, ceilings can be lowered physically or can be raised.

## **Decorative Ceilings**

Decorative ceilings in old houses are still a great source of inspiration and appeal. Beams, mouldings, pictorial scenes, designs and paint finishes have been the preferred treatments for ceilings for centuries. The eighteenth-century

architect and designer Robert Adam used designs on the ceilings that were taken from a room's woven carpets. Yet since the late 1920's, ceilings have been more or less ignored. The ceiling is now a smooth surface, usually painted in white. Rooms can be made altogether more interesting and more distinguished by giving the ceilings a special treatment. Possibilities include mouldings or cornices, giving them a special paint treatment, using fabric to create a tented effect or applying a skirting ceiling paper.

All the same, there are so many new materials and method (and updated revivals of old techniques) that the range of possibilities to choose from is endless. Like walls, ceilings also require attention when decorating a room. Architectural features such as cornices or a ceiling rose can be either emphasized or moderated. Similarly, a beamed ceiling can become a focal point for the room, or its impact can be reduced by painting beams and plaster in matching white or cream.

Think, too, about the effect of light fittings. A chandelier will draw the eye upwards, while tiny spotlights set into the ceiling have less visual impact. Special features such as ceiling fans not only provide ventilation, but also create interesting shadows, which in turn make the ceiling a focus of interest.

The ceiling's colour has a marked effect on the proportion of the room. A ceiling that is darker than the walls will appear lower, while a paler ceiling will appear higher.

If there is no cornice, consider how to make a neat break between the walls and ceiling.

Ceilings in bedrooms tend to be noticed more than in other rooms, which provides an opportunity to make them more decorative. Children may also appreciate some form of decoration on their bedroom ceilings.



## Tips for Special Ceiling Treatments

### If ceilings are a reasonable height

1. Paint the top stringing of the cornice (the part that edges out onto the ceilings) in a contrasting colour, or cover it with gold or silver leaf.
2. Add mouldings such as a cornice or a ceiling rose, if they do not exist already.

### If ceilings are too low

1. Install curtain pelmets just below the ceiling (rather than just above the tops of the windows) to make windows seem taller, and so in turn exaggerate the ceiling.
2. Make tall, narrow panels of walls using mouldings, paint or paper, again to draw the eye upwards.

3. Use shimmer paint on the ceiling.
4. Vertically striped paper or painted stripes lead the eye up to give the illusion of more height.
5. Plan a lighting scheme for the room very carefully. Install cool florescent lights.
6. Choose fabric for curtains carefully i.e. stretch voile or double thickness cheesecloth which can reflect light to light up the ceiling.

### **If the ceilings are too high**

1. Paint the ceiling a darker shade than the walls.
2. Install some recessed lighting, which will draw attention towards the walls instead of the ceilings.
3. Divide walls into three sections to break up the height.

## **Paints**

### **Paint Varieties**

Paint basically consists of pigment dispersed in some sort of binder, along with a solvent which makes the paint workable and evaporates when the paint dries. Some paints also contain resins or silica to provide particular characteristics, such as quick drying or anti-mildew properties.

Most paints are either water or oil based. The main advantages of water-based paints over the oil based variety are that water based paints dry more quickly, leave no smell behind and can be washed easily off hands and out of clothes.

### **Non-drip paints**

Both water and oil-based paints come in non-drip versions, which do not need thinning or stirring. They can therefore be applied straightaway from the tin to the wall or ceiling. These are especially very useful for ceilings.

### **Acrylic Paints**

Cover well and dry quickly, with less smell than oil-based paints.

### **Epoxy Enamels**

These give a hard gloss finish which resists dirt and can be used on ceramic tiles, metal, fibre glass and porcelain. They are ideal for painting over tiled walls in a kitchen or bathroom, where the look is in need of a change.

### **Textured Enamels**

Useful for painting wood panelling as well as wood furniture.

### **Distemper or Whitewash**

This consists of a chalk, known as whiting – dissolved in water and animal glue, with added pigments. It has long been used inside old houses because it lets the wall 'breathe', allowing moisture from damp walls to pass through it.

## Colourwashes

A colourwash is applied with a sponge or a decorator's brush over a base coat of matt emulsion, or over existing paint or walls or woodwork to achieve an attractive finish.

## Wallpapers

Wallpapers can very quickly set the mood in a room. They cheer up a dull room, change the feeling, style and apparent proportions, and give a sense of unity. They are extremely useful on uneven surfaces.

### Choosing Wallpapers

#### Lining paper

If the ceilings and walls are really uneven, lining papers can help achieve a good finish. The heavier the lining, the better it will hide defects. These should be hung horizontally and stuck precisely edge to edge, so that a neat finish is achieved when the actual wallpaper is applied.

#### Textured Papers

These are heavy wall papers with embossed patterns and are useful for covering irregular surfaces. These can be painted over and are usually used for dados in hallways because of their durability.

### Choosing wallpaper patterns

1. Dark papers generally make a room look smaller.
2. Vertical stripes make a room taller.
3. Horizontal stripes make a room look wider.
4. In a living room, it is preferable to use a simple design or fairly plain paper. Strong or definite patterns can be distracting and do not make a good background for paintings. A border frieze is a good way to finish the paper off here.
5. Mini-prints, small florals, linear prints, small geometrics, stripes, and modern abstract can be used successfully in a bedroom.
6. More open patterns look best in larger spaces.
7. Scenic and geometric designs, floral, large abstracts, papers with borders etc. look best in corridors and on staircases.

### Wallpaper Borders

Borders come in various depths and designs, from fanciful ribbons and swags to children's motifs to gardening and sporting themes. The main role of a border is either to define or break up a given space.

#### Using Borders

The most common way to use a border is to buy one that co-ordinates with or matches the chosen paper. These are used usually around the top of the wall just below the ceiling, or just below the cornice if there is one. Borders can also

be used along the skirting boards, around windows or doors, or even vertically down the corners of rooms.

## Alternative Wall Coverings

When deciding on wall coverings for the main rooms and bedrooms, paint or wallpaper treatments are the obvious choices. But there are various alternative wall coverings that can look great, which include fabric, mirror and tiles.

### Fabric

Fabric has been used to cover walls for centuries, first in India, the Far East, the Middle East, and then Europe.

### Walling

Upholstered walls are still common today - particularly in Europe. The process involves fixing a framework of thin batten to the wall, then lining the walls between with wads of polyester, and finally stretching the fabric over battens. The results are usually unique and quite luxurious, with the added bonus of providing effective insulation against both cold and noise.

### Hanging fabrics from rods

Another way of using fabric on walls is to treat it like a curtain, hanging from just below the ceiling.

### Sticking Fabrics on Walls

Some fabrics like tweed, wool or suede can be stuck to walls like wallpaper.

### Tenting

If the ceiling is in a bad state of repair, you can try tenting the ceiling – i.e. covering it with fabric.

### Mirroring

1. Floor to ceiling mirrors give a room added length, width and height, as well as extra light.
2. When a mirror is fixed on the wall at right angles to a window, it will seem to double the size of a room and also will reflect extra light by day.
3. Fixing mirrors from floor to ceiling doubles the apparent size of the room, by creating the illusion of an opening to another room.
4. Fixing mirrors in the space between two tall windows will make an enormous difference to light and brightness.
5. In a very dark room, lining the recesses at either side of a chimney breast with mirror will make a big difference. If you place a tall, bushy plant in front of each, with up lights behind, the effect will be very fresh and airy.

### Tiling

Tiled walls look fabulous. In ancient buildings in the Far East, Iran, Turkey, Italy and Spain, tiles were used in the grandest halls and rooms. The completely tiled rooms (floors, walls and ceilings) of the Alhambra in Granada and the Blue Mosque in Istanbul with its 20,000 blue glazed tiles covering the inside walls, are a source of great inspiration.

## Wood Panelling

There are many different ways to use wood panelling. It can be left plain, stained with a natural shade or colour, painted or grained to make it look like more expensive wood.

## Doors

When thinking about door treatments, first decide how decorative you want the door to be in the scheme. If the room has a beautiful old door, it can be made into a special feature by adding antique furniture in the room.

The most obvious way of drawing attention to a door is to paint it in contrasting shades to the rest of the room. A very ordinary door can be replaced, customized, or made to blend in with the rest of the room. To make the door blend in, paint it the same colour as the walls, or two shades lighter/darker than the walls.

Consider how solid a door should be; whether it should block out a view of an adjacent space, or offer a glimpse into it. Glass-panelled doors allow you to 'borrow' light from outside or from the room next door. If you do not want a clear view through, choose frosted or etched glass, which has the same effect in terms of lighting but is only translucent. For walls that have several solid wood doors - like kitchen cupboards or fitted wardrobes - consider exchanging them with glass panels.

Cut-outs are a fun way of customizing doors, particularly for children's rooms. They can be simple shapes, such as hearts or diamonds, or can take on more complicated shapes like animals. Stencilling on doors can also give a decorative effect. Whether it is a motif taken from elsewhere in the scheme or a calligraphic device such as a child's name, the effect can be equally appealing. Take the time to consider the handles of the doors, also. These should be in-keeping with the room's style - simple or decorative, period or modern.

## Floor

A good floor adds comfort, colour and texture to an interior. Being such a large surface, it has a major influence on the room's style and atmosphere. Floors are both expensive and inconvenient to replace, so the factor which should be considered is its longevity. This applies not only to the material, but also to the fittings.

## Suitable Flooring

Deciding on the right floor for a particular room is not about the taste alone. Consider the shape and size of the room, its architecture, furnishings, style, the amount/quality of natural light it receives and the room's purpose. Once all these elements have been carefully considered, you can think about the different materials that might work in the room. The first step in the flooring process is to plan and determine a room's overall purpose, intended appearance and personality.

Kitchen floors need to be durable and easy to clean, so choose surfaces like tiles, stones, varnished wood, or good quality vinyl. In bathrooms, the flooring must be able to withstand the effects of water and steam. Hard tiles are practical for bathrooms, but if something warmer and softer is required, consider good quality vinyl, natural floor bamboo or sea grass. For the living room, wall to wall carpet is luxurious, warm and quiet, but it may not be the most practical option. One solution is to introduce two levels of flooring: a foundation floor such as wood, that is exceptionally durable, and a second layer, like a rug. This second layer will help to moderate the noise associated with

wooden floors. Another advantage of using this combination of flooring is that the room can be altered season by season, simply by removing the top layer in summer, and putting it back in the winter.

## Architecture and Flooring

Architecture provides style definition. Look to the mouldings, window openings, baseboards, mantelpieces and other architectural elements and you can determine whether the space is formal, classical, modern or rustic. Often the short-cut to determining a house style is to know the date of construction, and then to match it to relevant interior and exterior design elements from that time period.

## Right Floor for the Room

Think about the effects of reflected light. Very shiny floors look cold, while matte flooring gives the appearance of softness. The way the light plays off the grain, with wood or stone is part of their beauty. Light coloured floors make a room look larger, while dark colours promote an intimate atmosphere. Texture also contributes to the mood; a smooth unbroken surface seems sleek and streamlined. A mixture of materials gives the impression of depth and complexity. Natural materials bring the outdoors inside. For a modern look, use pale neutral floor colours to give the room a clean and uncluttered appearance.

## Colour and Pattern

The size of a pattern is important, but scale is even more important. Generally, small patterns work best in small rooms and large patterns work best in large rooms. Make sure that the scale of the pattern is consistent with the overall design statement.

## Modern Looks

Materials appropriate for sleek, luxurious modernism are polished stone, rubber, neutral wall-to-wall carpeting and sophisticated vinyl. Cork flooring is also popular these days.

## Classic looks

Stone and wood flooring tiles are modern shortcuts to a classical interior look.

## Country Look

Mexican tile or honed stone can be good for establishing a well-loved rural design. A country farmhouse interior is best with wide pine boards. Another choice for this kind of décor is linoleum.

## Existing Floors

Floors are both expensive and inconvenient to replace, so do not make any rash decisions before studying the existing floors carefully. They might not need to be covered again, but can instead be polished, varnished, painted or repaired.

## Wood Floors

If parquet and timber floors are in reasonably good condition without any gaps, splits, frayed or splintered ends, they can just be polished. They can then be covered with rugs or left bare. If a floor is worn, the first task is sanding it. It can then be either stained a different colour – say, much darker, or maybe even a dark green or bronze - bleached or whitened. An alternative is to paint it with either floor paint or with acrylic emulsion. Another option can be a plain floor with a stencilled border or design.

Whichever treatment is chosen – plain, stained, bleached or painted - the floor will need to be sealed with two or three coats of protective varnish afterwards.

## Vinyl and Linoleum Floors

These floors can be enhanced by using oil-based paints, rather than emulsions, because emulsion does not adhere to their surfaces. Before applying any paint, it is essential to wash the floor thoroughly using a sugar soap solution, and then rinse it before allowing to dry.



## Concrete Floors

Paint is very effective on concrete flooring. Either special concrete floor paint can be used, or quality oil paint. Whichever paint is used, it should be finished off with acrylic floor varnish.

## Tiled Floors

Existing tiled floors with cracked or unsightly grout can be cleaned and re-laid with new grout.

## Juxtaposition

When planning flooring for a room, do not think of it in isolation, but in conjunction with the whole house flooring. Doors which lead off corridors and hallways are often left open, and glimpses of upper storeys can be seen from stairways. The floor coverings need to be coordinated, especially in a small apartment. It looks better if one colour is used for flooring throughout. Where different texture and colours meet at the doorways - i.e. carpet with tiling - a threshold strip should be inserted between the two to achieve a neat affect.

## Types of Floors

The way the floor looks is important, but so too are other factors. How much does it cost, is it easy to care for, how long can it be expected to last and so on? Most flooring options fall into three main categories:

- Hard Flooring
- Soft Flooring
- Flexible Flooring

### Hard Flooring

Hard flooring usually covers materials that are extremely rigid with virtually no flexibility at all. Brick, tiles, stone and wood are common types of hard floors - all hard-wearing surfaces, and are often best if used with area rugs.

#### Brick

Brick is an surprisingly good floor treatment, especially in the country - useful for halls, kitchens and cloakrooms. This type of floor should be laid on top of a solid level base or concrete screed. Modern bricks used for floors are thinner and lighter than conventional building bricks. Brick maintains a comfortable temperature that is cool in summer.



#### Floor Tiles

Tiles can be installed in different patterns for interest, and a border can be created around the perimeter of a room using different shaped coordinating tiles.

#### Ceramic Tiles

Non-slip ceramic tiles can look highly decorative in the right setting and climate, and are pleasantly smooth to walk on. Ceramic tiles come in a variety of colours and styles.



### **Terracotta Tiles**

Terracotta tiles come in various varieties. These are unglazed and they retain heat like bricks.



### **Quarry Tiles**

Unglazed quarry tiles are tough, dense and non-slip, and are also absorbent to some extent. These are made from unrefined high-silica clay and look rustic.

## **Laying and Maintaining Tiles**

All these types of tiles need a solid, level base and concrete screed. When tiles are laid, grout is used to fill the gaps. It is made from ground Portland cement and sand, mixed with water to form a quick drying paste. All unglazed tiles benefit from a liquid resin sealant, which acts like a heavy-duty polish.

## **Stone**

Stone floors give an elegant look to a home. They last practically forever, but are cold underfoot and are usually quite heavy.

### **Flagstones**

The term 'flag' refers to slicing stone into thin slabs. They usually come in irregular slabs and although some are cheaper than ceramic and terracotta tiles, they are more expensive to install. These slabs can be used in hallways or other rooms on the ground floor.



## **Slate**

Slate is often used as an alternative to marble, as it is much more stain resistant. These come in slabs and tiles and look best in squares or rectangles. Colours range from pale grey, green and blue grey to dark green, bluish-purple and black. The slabs are laid on a concrete screed or slab floor. Slate can be left untreated, but looks impressive if sealed and waxed.



## **Marble**

Marble brings a level of glamour and shine, but is quite expensive. The most fragile grades are usually more decorative with the most interesting veining and colouration. The more solid grades are usually classified as A and B, with the more delicate ones as C and D. The disadvantages of marble are that it scratches and stains easily. It is laid on a concrete sub-floor.

## **Terrazzo**

It consists of marble chips set in a cement base and polished to high sheen. Terrazzo is non-slip and durable. It is also laid on a concrete sub-floor.

## **Granite**

Granite is cheaper than marble. It is less likely to stain and scratch and is also less slippery. Like marble, it comes in slabs and very thin tiles, which means that it can be used in upstairs rooms as well. It comes in a variety of colours, in either a matte or polished finish.



## Concrete

Concrete looks very attractive in tile form, if it is painted or stained and waxed. It is also extremely practical, being both heat/cold resistant and scratch proof.

## Wood Flooring

Wood floor can be used anywhere in the house. Soft and hard woods can both be used for flooring, with softwood being cheaper. Softwoods include spruce, fir and pine – all of which should be finished with a polyurethane or oleo resinous sealer, and then polished if desired. For hard flooring, maple, oak, cherry and walnut are often used.

Wood flooring comes in various forms: planks, parquet, and mosaic panels. Wood flooring is available in either solid or laminated wood. The laminated type consists of a thin layer of hardwood veneer. A solid wood floor can be nailed directly to a wood sub-floor. If wood is laid on the concrete, a vapour resistant material would have to be used on top of the concrete, in order to act as a barrier against moisture. Laminated flooring, however, can be laid straight over the concrete.

## Soft Flooring

This soft furnishing category largely consists of carpets and rugs.

### Carpets

There are two main types of carpet: cut pile and loop pile.

#### Cut Pile Carpet

As the name suggests, the fibres of the carpet are sheared off, creating soft tufts above the carpet backing. This type of carpet is usually made of wool, nylon, polyester, acrylic or a combination of these materials. Wool is a resilient natural fibre that is moisture resistant, but it is relatively expensive compared to other carpet options. Nylon is strong and works well when mixed with other fibres. Polyester is less expensive and has a luxurious feel. Acrylic is a lower priced option to wool. Though it looks similar to wool, it is not quite as stain resistant.

How a carpet will wear depends on various factors, not just the material it is made of. The twist and density of the fibre are very important - higher numbers are better on these scales. Very closely tufted or woven carpet means that it will

wear more. Carpet tufts that are not dense have a tendency to squash down and flatten over time.



### **Loop Carpet**

The other type of carpet is loop-pile carpet, where the carpet fibres form loops above the carpet backing. Berber is a typical example of carpeting of the loop type.

Loop pile carpeting tends to be more resilient and hard wearing because of its construction. However, it is not as soft to the touch as cut pile carpet, therefore it is not as comfortable underfoot.

Looped carpeting is often made of olefin fibres, which are naturally stain resistant. There is a degree of variation in style within the looped carpet category. The loops can either be uniform in length or varied to create interesting patterns.



### **Cut and loop carpet**

This type of carpet combines both cut and loop varieties. Some of the fibres are left looped and others are sheared off to create soft tufts. The combination of different heights above the carpet backing can create interesting patterns. One of the biggest benefits of carpeting is its warmth, in comparison to other types of flooring.



## Alternative Floor Coverings

Natural matting such as sisal, coir, woven rush and sea grass can all provide attractive alternatives to carpeting. It is, however, tough on feet and slippery on the stairs, but it provides a great background for rugs.

### Rugs

Rugs are not only soft underfoot, but they soften hard floors and add colour and texture to a scheme. They are particularly useful to create zones within a room and to draw disparate items of furniture together.

Another advantage that rugs have over fitted carpets is that they can be moved around easily or replaced. Ethnic rugs are widely produced all over the world, which primarily fall into three categories: ethnic cotton, dense woollen piles, thick woollen weaves.

### Oriental Rugs

'Oriental rug' is the umbrella term for rugs, carpets, prayer mats runners and kilims made by nomadic tribesmen. The rugs were made to hang on walls, be draped over seating or be laid on floors. Oriental rugs are still produced in designs of the past and relate to the area to which they belong. Kilims are made using a technique of flat weaving, which is also known as tapestry weaving.

All oriental rug designs are based on traditional patterns and reflect the life, culture and customs of the Islamic and Far Eastern nations. The six traditional rug producing regions are Persia, Turkey, Turkestan, The Caucasus, India and China.

### Persian Rugs

- These are considered the finest of all oriental rugs.
- Persian rugs are generally woven in wool, using the special Senneh knot.
- Persian rugs are almost always rectangular or elongated rather than square.
- Their colouring is usually rich. Indigo or crimson are usually the main colours. Other colours usually include yellows, greens and browns.

- The Persians were the only Muslim people to represent men and animals (in hunting carpets).
- The designs are usually based on floral motifs, showing flower beds, pools and streams.
- Vase rugs are more formal motifs i.e. vases holding flowers.
- Persian rugs made before the eighteenth century can be classified according to their design: garden, vase, animal etc.

### Turkish Rugs

These come from the Anatolian region and are often called Anatolians by dealers. These differ from Persian rugs not only in design, but also in colours.

- The pile used in Turkish carpet is usually longer than that of Persian carpet, and very few colours are used.
- The most common background colours are red and blue. Prayer mats are usually woven in green as it is a sacred colour.
- Patterns are bold and geometric.

### Indian Rugs

- In Indian rugs, the designs mostly feature animals, birds, trees and flowers.
- The colours are usually lighter than those of Persian Rugs.
- The pile is usually longer than the Persian rug.



### Chinese Rugs

- The most common colours in Chinese rugs are blues, yellows, peach and rose.
- The designs and motifs are based on Chinese art. Examples of which include animals, especially dragons, and also flowers like the lotus, daffodil and pomegranate
- They usually have a longer pile.

### Caucasian Rugs

- These come from The Caucasus region, which is the mountainous area between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea.

- The distinguishing colours are red, blue, green and beige.
- The designs, though varied, are always severely rectangular.
- Animals, flowers and birds are common motifs.

### Turkoman Rugs

- These come from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan.
- Red is the prominent colour, although different tribes and areas can be identified by specific colours, i.e. Baluchis use a lot of dark blue with rust-red and bluish-mauves.
- Designs are usually geometric, with the rose motif also found in these rugs.



### Flexible Flooring

These are hard wearing, easy to maintain, and relatively inexpensive. Flexible floorings are not only practical, but are extremely decorative and warmer underfoot than tile or stone. Flexible flooring is dominated by rubber and vinyl products.

### Linoleum

This is made of linseed oil, pine resins, wood, ground cork and pigment pressed onto a jute backing. It comes in sheets and tiles. It is non-slip, reasonably priced and burn resistant. The tiles come in a wide variety of colours and the material can be inlaid to make attractive designs. Linoleum is glued to a spotless level surface, preferably plywood. The floor is also easy to clean.

## Cork

Cork is an attractive alternative to both vinyl and rubber. It is durable, economical, soft and quiet underfoot. It is a very resilient material and is made of compressed pieces of cork tree bark. It is useful in bathrooms, kitchens and play areas. It comes in sheet and tile forms. The tiles are usually pre-sealed - if unsealed, they will have to be varnished after laying. Cork is available in a range of colours.



## Vinyl

This is made from polyvinyl chloride. Vinyl flooring is comfortable to walk on, reasonably priced, easy to clean and available in a huge choice of colours and designs. Like linoleum, plain colours can be combined to form attractive-looking patterns. Vinyl is available in cushioned and flat varieties. The cushioned variety is slightly bouncy and very soft underfoot; it also provides good sound insulation. Solid vinyl comes in plain colours, but also in realistic imitations of marble, terrazzo, lime stone, wood and terracotta tiles. Vinyl is available in both sheet and tile forms.

## Rubber

Rubber flooring is more hard wearing than vinyl and offers greater sound suppression as you walk on it. It is resistant to burns and dents. It is available in both sheet and tile forms, which come in a range of colours including primaries, pastels and industrial black. The studded and ribbed versions are very non-slip (which makes them useful in bathrooms), but they are also difficult to clean and are not really suitable for kitchens.

## Furniture

The choice of furniture plays a vital role in the appeal of a room. No other element plays such an important role in determining how well a scheme works, both practically and aesthetically.

The style, shape, and proportion of a major piece of furniture all have a strong influence on the look of a room. Consider, for example, the effect of a four-poster bed in a bedroom, compared with that of two single beds. Style also relates to the materials and finish - a polished mahogany table will give a much more formal appearance than a white painted one. Furniture also provides the perfect opportunity to unite the old with the new. For example, a traditional armchair might be combined with a modern coffee table.

The layout of furniture in a room will determine whether it feels formal or relaxed, cosy or spacious. Sometimes, a single item can be used as a focal point to draw the eye and alter the perception of space. For example, a tall and narrow bookcase will draw attention upwards, creating an impression of height. Meanwhile, a low and wide bookcase will emphasize horizontal space.

No matter what style is chosen, furniture must always satisfy the functional needs of a room and those who use it. There is a wide range of options available for seating, surfaces and storage.

## Furniture Needs

The simplest approach is to make a note of seating requirements, after a complete assessment of how many seats will be required. Assess the existing furniture in relation to the floor plan and the style and mood that is required. The floor plan will also give you the opportunity to rethink the arrangement of furniture. For example, a sofa and two chairs with a table in the middle is a classic combination, but you may prefer to place two sofas opposite each other. You may even choose to replace the sofa with armchairs to make space for a bookcase. It is important to buy a mixture of furniture types, shapes and sizes to cater to the different people who will use the space, and also for the various activities that will take place in the room.

With sofas and armchairs, consider the amount of maintenance they require. Feather and down cushions on seating are soft and inviting, but they will need plumping up regularly. Quilted foam, on the other hand, bounces back into shape. Similarly, a sofa with a tightly upholstered back needs much less maintenance than one with loose cushions.

Everyone needs a place to put things down. A coffee table is essential to tie a seating arrangement together. The coffee table should be positioned an appropriate distance from the sofa. Make sure that no one has to lean forward to reach drinks, and provide a distance of two to three feet between the table and sofa to leave room for people's feet and legs.

There is no ideal height for a coffee table. It is purely down to personal preference, although one that is about 21 inches high will be easier to dine on. Remember that a coffee table that is much higher than the seat of the couch will look out of place. Keep end tables around the same height (about 24 inches) and depth (usually 15 inches) as the arms of the sofa or chair next to it. A couple of inches above or below is fine, but end tables that are 5 inches (or more) higher or lower will be awkward for guests to use while seated.

Material choice is important to keep in mind. Transparent tables, or those made of glass, can make a tight space feel bigger. By contrast, heavy material can make a space look cramped.

## Furniture Arrangements

Apart from the style of the furniture, the way that it is arranged is of paramount importance. So, your starting point should be to think about how the pieces will work together. If you have to redecorate a room, you should have a clear idea of what to include in your scheme, what to discard and what extra pieces you will have to acquire. If the room has to be redesigned, you must have a clear idea of exactly what furniture you will need, how you want to use it, what sizes will work best and where you want to place it.

### Establishing Priorities

However pretty a room is, if it does not function well, it is a failure. In order to function well, a room has to be arranged properly - it is as simple as that.

- If the furnishings are not appropriate...
- If there is no real focal point in the room...
- If people do not feel comfortable in the room...

- If there is no place to read or relax...
- If there is nowhere nearby to place a glass or coffee cup...

In all the cases mentioned above, the room is definitely not functioning well - regardless of how brilliantly it has been decorated. The ideal arrangement for any room is for each piece to be placed where it works best *and* looks best. But there is often a conflict between the aesthetic and the practical. An armchair, for example, might look good in a corner to help balance the furnishings in the room, but it might never actually get used. So, when you have to choose between aesthetic and practical considerations, the practical must take priority. Armchairs are meant to be used, not just looked at. Find something else of comparable visual quality - like a large plant or a side table - to create balance. Although people's needs vary, there are some general criteria to follow at all times with regard to furniture arrangement.

### **Seating Groups**

Any piece of seating cannot be considered alone, unless it is an occasional chair, or a desk with a chair. Seating should be considered as part of a group. A chair on which you can sit comfortably while reading should be accompanied by a side table and a light source, preferably a lamp, at the right level for reading. For more comfort, you might also include a footstool. This arrangement, in turn, should be considered as part of a larger seating group. Usually, this larger group is a conversation group and includes a sofa and at least one other armchair. Possibly a love seat as well, depending on the availability of space. This seating group should be provided with good lighting and with some sort of nearby table or surface. You could, for example, combine an end table with a large upholstered stool or a good-sized coffee table in the centre of the grouping. In addition, there should be some focal point around which the seating is arranged.

### **Manipulating Space**

Space is as important an element in a room as the objects in it. There has to be a balance amongst the physical objects present in the room and the empty space. In general, rooms with a lot of space around the furnishings look better than overly packed rooms, because they seem lighter and airier. Along with improving the aesthetic of a room, the manipulation of space plays an important role in its traffic patterns. Traffic patterns should be established when planning the positions of furniture, so that there can be free and easy movement throughout the room. A few guidelines to remember:

- The major passageway through a room should be at least 4 feet wide, though preferably 5 feet, to allow enough room for two people to walk side by side.
- Allow about 18 inches between dining chairs and at least 2 feet to pull a dining chair back from the table. There should be at least 4 feet between the dining table and the wall, so that people can walk behind the diners when diner is in progress.
- There should be 12 to 18 inches between a sofa and an armchair or a coffee table, so that people can get up easily from a sitting position. And at the same time, the table should not be too far from the people to reach for putting a book or glass on the table.
- In front of the dresser or bureau, 3 feet of space is necessary to allow the drawers to be pulled out.

### **A Sense of Balance**

Before selecting any furniture for a room, the first thing to consider is scale and balance. This involves the ratio of vertical lines (tall pieces) to horizontal lines (low pieces), and the proportion of light items to solid ones.

- If a room mostly consists of tall pieces - i.e. a wall unit, large pictures, mirrors, tall plants, high backed chairs and sofas - it will look stiff, formal and uncomfortable.
- If there are all low lines - i.e. low backed seating, small plants, low storage, low hung mirror, and paintings hung low on the wall - the room overall will look incomplete, slightly disturbing and again, uncomfortable.
- If most of the objects in the room are solid and heavy, the room will look overstuffed and dark.
- If all the furnishings are very light - say several occasional chairs and a cane or wicker sofa - the room appears to lack substance.

There has to be a happy medium in a well-arranged room. This, however, does not mean having half vertical and half horizontal lines, or half solid and half lightweight items. Generally, most rooms look best with a predominant number of low pieces, set off here and there by taller pieces of varying heights. They could progress, perhaps from a low upholstered stool or sofa to a wing chair, and then to a side table or lamp and finally to the really tall lines of an armoire, a bureau-bookcase, a painting, a mirror over a side table, a fire place or tall plants.

Similarly, sofas and armchairs which are solid should be balanced by the openness of occasional chairs, the lightness of a glass table or the height of a storage unit. A dresser or bookcase can be balanced by a tall leafy plant in the room. Planning a room is much easier if you start with larger and heavier pieces, and then balance them carefully with permanent features, such as fireplaces, doorways, windows and shelves. When all this is clear in your mind, you can decide where to fill in the smaller pieces.

Other features like floor, walls and window treatments all contribute strongly to the balance of the room. A patterned fitted carpet or an oriental rug will be visually heavier and will have more importance in the room than an plain wooden or tiled floor. Dark coloured walls will look heavier than pale colours. All these factors have to be considered when working with the furniture arrangement.



### **Suitability of Position**

How well the arrangement of the furniture has been handled is affected by environmental factors.

### **Environment**

Extreme climatic conditions need to be considered when positioning the furniture. Strong sunlight will make both wood and fabrics fade, so fabrics used for upholstered pieces placed near a window should be as fade-resistant as possible. If furniture is covered in a fabric that's likely to fade, do not place it near the window. In areas with a hot climate, consider the position of the ceiling fan before deciding on the seating layout. Pianos and other musical instruments, if

possible, should be placed near an inside wall, rather than near windows or radiators.

### Listening and Viewing

Stereo equipment should be placed near or against a hard wall, facing soft surfaces like curtains and upholstery. A television screen should be placed in a position so that it can be viewed by several people at the same time.

### Creating a Focal point

If there is no natural focal point in the living room - like a fireplace or a window - you will need to create one. A focal point is a central point of interest, around which you can place various furniture groupings. It can be a large painting or a group of small ones, a tapestry or a rug mounted on a wall, an interesting book case or a media wall - even a low table decorated with interesting items might be a focal point.

## Creating Arrangements on Plan

The next stage is to check whether your proposed arrangements will work, by drawing them to scale on the floor plan. Draw them on graph paper. Most pieces of furniture have fairly standard measurements, so you can use the templates of the most common furniture pieces. Making a floor arrangement plan helps you to see if anything has been left out, along with what should be left in and what should be purchased new.

## Furniture Arrangement Checklists

Use a checklist to remind yourself of the factors you need to take into account for the furniture placement in the room.

- **Practicality** - will it work well?
- **Aesthetics** - will it look good?
- **Organization of space** - is there going to be enough space around the individual furniture items?
- **Traffic planning** - can people move around easily?
- **Scale and balance** - will the furniture look well balanced, without any individual item dominating?
- **Environmental aspects** - will the furniture be exposed to too much sun, humidity, heat, cold, or dryness?
- **Ease of use** - will people be able to listen to music and watch television easily, and is there a good focal point?

## Upholstered Furniture

The most important thing to know about upholstered furniture is that what you see is not necessarily what you get. An upholstered piece should feel as good as it looks, but it is the inner construction that counts. Therefore, always look at the label detailing the construction of an upholstered piece – don't just take it at face value.

### Construction Methods

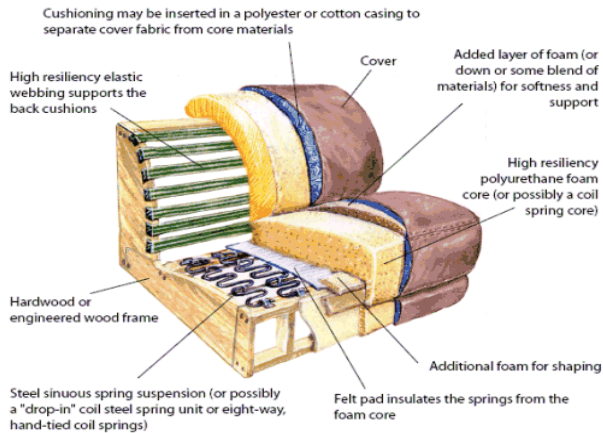
In order to know what to look for when buying upholstered furniture, it is very important to have some idea about how it is constructed.

There are two types of upholstery:

1. Fully upholstered pieces, such as sofas, love seats, armchairs, slipper chairs and upholstered stools, are completely covered with upholstery with no frame showing, except possibly the lower part of the legs.
2. Exposed frame pieces, like occasional chairs, chaises and stools, have parts of the frame showing. |

## THE INSIDE STORY: UPHOLSTERY

Construction features vary depending on furniture design and price



Source: American Furniture Manufacturers Association

The frame is constructed first. Good quality furniture should be made from oak, walnut, teak or pine. The joints should be glued and double or triple doweled, corner-blocked and screwed. Next comes the webbing, which is the bottommost material used on an upholstered piece, to hold the other layers. Good strong webbing should be made from jute, flax or a synthetic material and woven into a basket weave design, which is tacked to the bottom of the frame.

In top quality furniture, the springs come after webbing. Such furniture incorporates coil springs, which are set close enough together to provide good support without actually touching each other - these are hand tied in place. About eight springs are used for one chair. Cheaper furniture usually makes use of more rigid springs. On top of the springs goes a tough layer of canvas or hessian, which is sewn firmly to keep the padding intact. According to the quality of the furniture, this padding consists of polyurethane foam, polyester, rubberized hair, foam rubber or feathers. The best quality furniture has a final layer of fibre fill or cotton felt, which is eased just over the upholstery fabric. Sometimes this layer has a protective covering of muslin to reduce the tension on the covering and thus help maintain the shape. When upholstery fabric is stretched over the furniture, it is often trimmed with matching or contrasting piping to give it more fit and definition.

### Commonly used Fabrics

The upholstery fabric has to be durable because it has to withstand a great deal of wear and tear. The hardest-wearing fabrics are densely woven cotton, denim, cotton rep, twill and brocade, and these are all cotton based. Linen mixed with cotton is often used for loose coverings; velvet (which is either cotton based, or linen based) is also used for this purpose. Wool is soft, but an excellent upholstery fabric. Loosely woven wool (or loosely woven texture of any type) is not suitable for upholstery. Leather and suede, though expensive, always look luxurious and are extremely long-lasting.

## Checking for Quality

If the furniture is covered with patterned, striped or checked fabric, make sure that the designs are centred and that lines and checks are straight. If there are any buttons, make sure that they are sewn well through the filling - not just attached to the fabric. Run your hands over the piece to make sure that there are no lumps or bumps.

## Non-Upholstered Furniture

Wood furniture, whether it is new or old, is made of either hard woods (such as mahogany, rosewood, oak, maple, walnut, teak, yew or cherry) or of soft wood (like pine). All wood furniture, whether antique or modern, should be checked for stability and its quality of construction and finish.



## Chairs

It is very important to check the joints of the chairs, whether they are new or antique. The joints should be constructed with corner blocks, preferably with ribs, which are designed to strengthen the joints that come under considerable pressure. There should be no gaps between the joints, and the joints should be smooth. Bear in mind that straight legs have the greatest strength. In order to test the stability of a chair, lean on the piece to see if it tips easily. Then push it a little to see if it wobbles. Finally inspect it for the finish and make sure that there are no bubbles or streaks.

## Tables

Make sure that the joints have been constructed with corner blocks for strength. If there are extending leaves, make sure that they match the main part of the table. Also check that the extending leaves are easy to fit and remove.

## Case Goods

These are storage pieces like wardrobes, dressers, desks, bureau-bookcases, sideboards and chests of drawers. When inspecting this sort of furniture, make sure that the doors swing well and fit well. Drawers should slide easily and smoothly. The bottoms of the drawers should be strong. The inside should be smoothly finished. Fine quality furniture has thin layers of wood.

## Hardware

Another important thing to examine carefully is the hardware (the knobs, handles and hinges). These should be of appropriate shape, scale and material.

## Glass, Plastic or Metal Furniture

### Glass

Glass is mainly used for tabletops and shelves. Make sure that the glass has a thickness of 5mm preferably 1.2 – 2cm for practical use. It should have smooth edges and nice finishing.



### Plastic

These include fibreglass, laminated plastic, polystyrene, polyvinyl and acrylic. Plastic often picks up scratches very easily. Check that the pieces are thick enough to stand up to heavy use. The joints should be strong and the overall finish should be neat.



## Metal

Angle iron, wrought iron, brass, copper, stainless steel, chrome plated tubing can all be used for furniture. These should be checked to make sure that there are no bubbles and that it is smooth and free of weak spots.



## Cane, Wicker, Rattan and Bamboo

This type of furniture is usually used in conservatories, gardens and porches. Check that it is sturdily constructed, and the joints are bound well.



Wicker furniture



Bamboo



Cane



Rattan

## Beds

### Mattress Types

There are several different types of mattresses - all of them quite different from each other.

#### Inner Spring Mattresses

These consist of about 800 or so coiled springs, approximately 7 inches thick.

#### Foam Mattresses

This is a lightweight mattress and is made of urethane or latex foam. It should be between 10 cm and 15 cm thick, and firm to the touch.

## Stuffed Mattresses

These are not large enough to hold inner springs. They are much thinner and consist of polyester or cotton topped with foam.

## Water Beds

As the name suggests, these are filled with water. They are especially good for circulation, discouraging bed sores and aiding restful sleep.

## Guest Beds

There are a few types of beds particularly useful for occasional guests:

- A sofa bed can be used as a sofa, and when required can be pulled out to become a spare bed.
- A daybed can be made into a full-size bed by sliding out a frame from underneath.
- A rise and fall single bed contains a second bed underneath.
- A Murphy bed folds up against a wall behind a panel and so is ideal for use in a studio or one roomed apartment.

## Headboards

There is a huge range of headboards available, including those made of padded fabric, wood, brass, perspex, chrome, cane and white or black painted iron. Almost all headboards are sold separately from the rest of the bedframe.

## Arranging Bedroom Furniture

Beds should be placed leaving a margin of about 2 to 3 feet on either side to allow safety of movement around them. Modern low beds are great in spaces with lower ceilings. If you choose an extra-tall bed frame, make sure that the ceiling height is at least 10 feet. Headboards should be tall enough to lean on comfortably while reading (about 2 feet tall). The style of the bed frame, whether a sleek wooden platform, dark sleigh bed, or wrought iron canopy, will set the tone for the other items in the room. The role of the bedside table is to provide space to store essentials. It's nice to have two that match, but it's by no means mandatory. The surface should be stable enough to hold something like a glass of water. When it comes to the size of the dressers, space will often dictate whether you go for a wide and long one (ideal for a narrow room) or a square and medium-height alternative (for a square room with little wall space). The top of the dresser is prime real estate and can quickly become cluttered with keys, sunglasses and general accessories. Use a combination of trays, bowls and boxes to create a space for everything.

If the space allows it, a comfortable seating area in the bedroom makes a large room feel more intimate. Options range from modern rocking chairs to luxury lounge chairs. Each sends a very different message; the key is to reflect and enhance the style of the room.

## Storage

To work out storage requirements, think about the different activities for which the room is used. Built-in storage like alcove cupboards look elegant, but freestanding storage furniture can be moved if necessary for greater flexibility. A mixture of the two can also be used. Furniture that combines storage with another function is extremely useful, especially in a small space. For example, a coffee table with shelves or drawers for magazines, or beds with drawers for

storing bed linen. Remember that furniture for storage should not just be functional - consider its visual impact too.

## Furniture Style

When choosing any piece of furniture - be it a sofa, a bookcase, an armoire, a bureau or a chest of drawers - it must not only work well in terms of comfort or practicality, but should also suit the style of the room. It must create a pleasing effect with the other items in the scheme. Think about the key issues of shape, scale, colour and texture.

The larger and more permanent items of furniture, such as sofas, dressers and armchairs, naturally have a great impact on the style of an interior. Particularly large or decorative pieces often become the focal points. The key pieces should always be chosen to suit the style and proportions of the internal architecture. If the bedroom has a low ceiling, a boxy or overly tall bed should not be placed there. Using furniture that is very solid looking, such as dark wooden pieces, can make a small room feel very crowded. Furniture made of glass, laminates, shiny metals, cane and light-coloured wood will lessen the effect of solidity, giving an airier feel to a room. Of course, seating need not always mean fully upholstered furniture. A rattan sofa with seat cushions will appear much less dense and imposing in a room.

Finally, remember that less is often more: a few well-chosen and carefully placed items will maximize the light and space in a room, which is essential for a feeling of relaxation and comfort.

Smaller items of furniture offer great scope in terms of both style and practicality. They are also the most portable items of furniture and can be moved around a room or home to revitalize different areas. The list of smaller pieces to choose from is huge – it includes occasional tables, coffee tables, sofas, end tables and side tables. All of which can be used for decorative displays, or to extend surface areas when entertaining.

Decorative screens are useful for dividing space, concealing awkward areas, or creating a more intimate atmosphere in a large room. Whether painted, made of textured wood or fabric-covered, they also add interest to an interior. Large baskets are very versatile and can be placed at the end of a bed to store bed linen and blankets, kept in the hall for winter accessories or used in a family room for games and videos. They also bring pleasing natural colours to the room.

## Tips on Arranging Furniture

1. If you choose furnishings with colours that closely match their intended background, the items will effectively disappear - leaving the room with a much less cluttered appearance. For instance, a beige sofa against a beige carpet and beige walls. If you want furniture to stand out, this can be achieved by choosing furnishing in contrasting colours.
2. A three-seater sofa rarely accommodates three people happily. Use a three-seater sofa, but with two cushions on it.
3. In a dining room, don't forget to allow enough space around the table to move freely, taking into account the need to pass behind a chair that is in use. A minimum space of approximately 90cm (3 feet) between a table and a wall will be required for comfort.
4. Stools and pouffes are useful for occasional sitting in the living room. They take up little space and can sometimes incorporate storage spaces in their base.
5. When designing wardrobes be careful to allow sufficient depth for coat hangers.
6. Try to arrange furnishings so that people entering the room are greeted by a pleasant view.
7. Kitchen units and vanity units should have a recessed plinth to make it possible to stand close to the work surface or basin.

8. In a kitchen, wall units that extend all the way up to the ceiling will eliminate an obvious dust trap. It's an arrangement that will also provide invaluable long-term storage.
9. When ordering furniture, consider ease of access to the house.

## The Finishing Touches

Once all the ground work has been done, it has to be finalized and enhanced further. The furnishings and finishes need to be completed and then maintained as well as possible. And finally, all artworks and objects, flowers and plants, and general accessorizing can be decided upon.

The ideal room is one that manages to look both interesting and relaxing; used but not abused. Upholstery should look neat, and cushions should be plumped and well arranged. But at the same time, the upholstery should look deeply comfortable and welcoming. If curtains are held back with tie-backs, they should be positioned at just the right height for the folds to look graceful. Blinds should be pulled up so that they are straight. Carpets, rugs, matting and hard flooring - all should look as clean as possible. Polished wood should be kept polished. Marble, glass and any metals should be free of spots.

Tabletops, windowsills, mantelpieces, display units and shelves should look best with some sense of arrangement. Plants, collections and art should be carefully chosen and should be arranged properly, but should not look like they have been arranged in an artificial way. Never to such an extent that you're nervous about putting down a glass in the wrong place for fear of spoiling an artistic effect.

## Accessories

Decorative objects or accessories are crucial elements that can finish a scheme off perfectly. From handcrafted items and antiques to flowers and other objects, these are the decorative details that are often small in size but big in impact. In design terms, they play a vital role in creating accents of colours, form and texture in a room. Whether displayed singly or in groups, they provide a point of focus for the eye and greatly enrich the entire scheme.

If lighting, colour schemes, window and floor treatments and the choice of furniture and upholstery are what makes a room comfortable, then the paintings, objects, plants, flowers and other embellishments are the elements that make it memorable. They layer an interior scheme, thereby accentuating the colours, patterns, shapes and textures within the room.

There are two schools of thought on the display of objects: the school for simplicity and the school for clutter. The problem with the simple school is that the few objects used for display should be really beautiful or unusual, or at least made to appear so. The difficulty about the 'cluttered' school is that the collections must be organized to display the possessions to their best advantage. This involves a careful assemblage of texture, shape and colour. Collections of small objects are far more effective when grouped together, rather than scattered thinly around the room. For example, very small objects like pebbles, shells or polished fragments of stones from the beach can be put into a bowl and displayed on windowsills. Slightly larger objects can be grouped in a way that they have something in common, like colour, texture, shape or origin. Alternatively, they can be juxtaposed with larger or smaller objects to create more interest and balance. You can add a plant or some dried flowers in a jar for contrast. If arrangements are grouped on a small table that is also used for books, magazines, glasses and so on, leave space so that the composition will not be ruined by putting down a tray, drink or book. If arrangements are placed on a glass table or shelf, you can light them from underneath to add charm. If they are not on a transparent surface, try lighting them with from above to add extra brilliance.

Some accessories are purely decorative, but others (such as candlesticks and vases) have a functional role too. It is important when completing a room to be aware of this difference. Function must determine where something is placed, in terms of both height and location. Decide which of the items you want to be prominent and place them at key focal points in the room. Use other objects in a 'supporting' role.

Purely decorative accessories are only worth including if you display them well. Location is important, especially in terms of the colour against which they are set, how they are lit and whether it is a single object that becomes a focal point, or a group that needs to be carefully arranged for the maximum effect.

## **Displaying Pictures**

The way the objects and pictures are displayed plays a crucial part in the success of a room. Consider pictures first - do not dot them around a room, one on each wall, as this will only emphasize the spaces between them. Instead, group them together on one wall, even if it means leaving the other three bare. If these are the pictures of smaller subject matter, size and frame, accentuate this connection by making the arrangement symmetrical. For example, six prints can be hung in two rows of three, or in three rows of two. Such symmetrical arrangements are also possible with disparate images and sizes. A large picture could be placed centrally, with smaller images flanking it on other side. Pictures that are double hung, one on top of the other, also look eye catching. Particularly so in rooms where they are viewed from a sitting position, such as dining or living rooms.

Images for the walls are not limited to drawings, prints and paintings. Also choose from posters, post cards, photographs and framed embroidery. A small piece of special fabric or hand printed wallpaper also looks wonderful when framed.

Large single pictures look best hung over a mantelpiece, or over a significant piece of furniture such as a sofa or sideboard, centred within its space. Make sure that the picture is no wider than the item it is being hung over, and beware of hanging it too low over a sofa.

## **Displaying other works of Art**

### **Wall hangings**

Fabric wall hangings are the ideal solution for covering large areas decoratively and they can hide a multitude of blemishes or eyesores on the wall too. Ethnic rugs make popular wall hangings. There is a vast range of materials to choose from to suit every style of room.

### **Mirrors**

Mirrors are versatile. With an attractive wooden or gilded frame, they are extremely decorative. They reflect light and help to create the illusion of more space. A large mirror placed at the end of a dark and narrow passageway opens up the area dramatically. In a small room mirrors, placed opposite windows create a feeling of greater space and airiness. With pairs of windows, a smaller mirror placed between them provides added dimension. A large mirror over a mantelpiece or bigger pieces of furniture, such as a sofa, provides a focal point in the room.

## Displaying Collections

Whatever you choose to display, whether it is a prized china ornament, a pottery vase or a collection of items, it is important that they are displayed to their advantage. To make the most of a thematic collection, anything from china and glassware to collectibles such as perfume bottles, always try to group them together. Any arrangement looks better if the grouped items have a common factor, be it shape, colour or texture. Otherwise, the display will risk looking like clutter.



## Unusual Collections

A collection of ordinary but unexpected objects often makes for a more memorable room than much rarer and more expensive items. Perhaps this is because you are less impressed by the effect of something you know to be good than something you have no idea about.

## Sculpture

Sculpture always adds distinction to a room. Almost all sculpture looks better on some type of plinth, whether it is stone, wood, fibreglass, marble or plaster.

## Screens

Screens are very adaptable. They may be used instead of drawn curtains at a window, they can disguise an ugly or functional corner, they can provide a decorative barrier behind which to store things or then can serve as a room divider.

## Lighting

Although lighting has its role in terms of illumination, lights and lamps have a decorative role to play too. If you want a light for a room that is decorative as well as being functional, then decide how big it needs to be for its chosen location and purpose. Not forgetting, how it might reflect the style of the room in terms of colour, shape and material. Generally, lamps and wall lights work well in pairs.

Table lamps come in different sizes and shapes. Think about the base first; should this be chosen to blend into the main colour scheme, or should it be in an accent colour? Should it be plain or patterned, high or low, slim or round? Lamp shades also come in a wide variety of colours, sizes, shapes and styles. They can also be decorated by stencilling motifs

onto a card shade. A central ceiling pedant should never be the *only* source of lighting within a room.

## Arranging Art

### Unifying a set

A set of prints can be given a sense unity. It can be framed in the same material, whether, chrome, brass, gilding, silver or natural wood. Again, an odd assortment of different subjects will have a unity of their own, if they share a colour: all sepia tints or all black and white, or all green, ivory or terracotta



### Hanging Heights

When there are lots of different things to hang, try not to hang them too high or too far apart. Do not fix anything so low that people risk knocking their heads on it. Try to hang as much as possible at eye level. If there is a very large grouping, group at least the central pieces at eye level. If seating in the room consists of low-level couches or chairs, some pictures, prints or posters can be hung lower than usual.

A few guidelines to follow:

Most artwork will stand out on dark walls, although some drawings and graphics can look good even on grey or neutral colours.

If the walls are strongly patterned, it is best to give prints and drawings very deep mounts, so that the subject is not lost in the surrounding background design.

Before hanging different sizes of pictures (or other wall-mounted objects) that vary in size, shape and style, lay them out on the floor first and move them around until you find a composition that works. Decide what works best with other arrangements in the room and the wall space available.

Decide on the overall shape of the arrangement and mark out the area on the wall in pencil, before you attempt to hang several things together. This will save a lot of unwanted nail holes.

- Vertical arrangements of art make a room look taller.
- Horizontal arrangements of art make a room look longer.
- A grouping of small works of art can be hung as a block to balance a large painting.



### **Alternative Art**

There are plenty of alternatives to conventional art. Framed bits of fabric like antique lace, square pieces of fabric pinned together like a patch work, interesting bed spreads, rugs, pieces of jewellery, old advertisements, and collections of post cards.

Suspend heavy fabrics on a slim curtain rod hung on hooks. Unless the fabric is very rare, turn over the top to make the casing for the rod.

Frame lighter fabrics underneath Perspex or glass or stretch them like canvas over thin wood frames.

Hang smaller items on top of a square of velvet or canvas and then stretch on a frame.

### **Flowers and Plants**

There is almost no gap in a room that a plant cannot fill. Likewise, there's no piece of furniture that cannot be balanced and made to look better by a display of leaves, and no corner that is not softened by flowers.

#### **Light and aspect**

The choice of plant is governed by the amount of light a room receives and its aspect (the direction in which the windows face). If the aspect and light are not right for the plant, the plant cannot survive.

#### **Using Plants Creatively**

Plants can be put in anything (basket, terracotta pot, or stainless steel planter) - it all depends on what best suits the mood of the room. Plants can be grouped with sculpture. Tall plants and indoor trees make subtle room dividers. A bushy indoor tree or a well-planted hanging basket set in front of a window can make it look completely dressed.

#### **Lighting Plants**

Use up lights behind plants to throw dramatic shadows onto walls and ceilings, while illuminating the foliage on a dull day or at night. Plants can be placed under down lights.

### **Decorating With Fresh Flowers**

Cut flowers and container plants offer the perfect way of introducing nature into a room. Their vivid colours, bold

shapes, textural leaves and inviting scents will all lift a scheme. The colours of the plants should complement the colours of the room. Bold displays of flowers or plants suit the areas like living rooms or hallways, but for the bedroom something less intrusive is usually more suitable.



### **Decorating with dried flowers**

Dried flowers, leaves and berries can be used to make flower arrangements, as well as wreaths, garlands and even dried trees. Dried florist's foam or crumpled chicken wire is used to hold everything in place. Most plant materials can be dried by hanging them in small bunches in a dry and airy place.



### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Elements of Interior Design (Hardcover) March 19, 2019*
- ✓ *Elements of Interior Design by Fawn Galli 2019*