Arranging Furniture

furnishing your home

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
J. E. Hutchison, Director, College Station, Texas
Arranging Furniture

The final appearance, convenience and comfort of any room depends largely upon the furniture arrangement. This is a matter of properly coordinating furnishings with family activities and the floor space you have for each room.

Every family differs in interests, hobbies and activities. So you need to take a look at what your family does; making a list of the activities that take place in each room.

In today's homes, most rooms are used for a combination of activities. This means special thought must be given to the choice and arrangement of furniture so each activity can be carried on with equal convenience. At the same time, the room should be planned as a unit.

Rarely is a piece of furniture used by itself. Instead, it is arranged in relation to other pieces to achieve comfort and convenience and in relation to the space and architectural features of the room to achieve good design.

Plan On Paper

Floor space is already organized to some extent by partitions and architectural features of your house. Your task is to further organize this space to suit the activities that will take place in each room.

It is far easier to push a pencil than to push furniture. So try out arrangements on paper first.

Use graph paper or measure and draw your rooms to scale, allowing one-quarter inch per foot. Be sure to indicate the architectural details, such as windows, doors and fireplace. Then make furniture models or templates in the same scale.

Now you are ready to start placing furniture in the room.

The conversation group is usually the starting point in a living area; the dining group in the dining room and the sleeping group in the bedroom. Once the main arrangement is carefully worked out, other groupings can be arranged.

Remember that rooms have three dimensions and that sometimes an arrangement that looks good on flat paper is not balanced properly when the height of the furniture is considered. To check this, the side wall and furniture elevations can be drawn to scale in the same way as you did the floor plan.

Furniture groupings play a major role in a room's capacity to adapt to different situations. Much of today's furniture is designed to be versatile—it can be shifted about, looks well from all sides and may play several roles.

Allow Ample Space

Patterns of living vary so there are no hard-and-fast rules that apply to all families. However, there are some basic guidelines that will help you in furniture placement.

Allow ample space for people to move easily within the room and to use the furniture with convenience. If the space is adequate for use and cleaning, there will be a minimum need for moving furniture to fit activities. Some of the space needs you need to check carefully include:

Living Area
- Major traffic path—4 feet to 6 feet
- Minor traffic path—1 foot, 4 inches to 4 feet
- Floor space in front of chair or sofa—1 foot, 6 inches to 2 feet, 6 inches

Dining Area
- Table space for each adult—21 inches to 24 inches
- Space to rise from table—32 inches
- Space to edge past seated person—36 inches
- Space between table edge and wall for serving—44 inches

Sleeping Area
- Space for bed making—22 inches
- Space in front of closet—36 inches
- Space for dressing—36 inches to 42 inches (both directions)
- Space in front of dresser—40 inches

Seating space at desk—3 feet
Guidelines On Arrangement

1. Keep traffic lanes open.
   The paths that people take when walking through a room form the traffic pattern. Place major conversational groups so that they are not disturbed by traffic. If doors are so placed that traffic must bisect the room, you may be able to arrange a main group and a second smaller group.
   It is sometimes possible to arrange furniture to redirect traffic and to make the room more usable and interesting.

2. Place large pieces close to and parallel to the wall.
   They will take up less floor space and conform to the lines of the room.

3. Each room should have a center of interest or focal point.
   This can be a fireplace, a window area, an important piece of furniture or a beautiful accessory. The way furniture is arranged can dramatize your choice.

4. Group together the pieces that are used together.
   A work corner with supplies close to the work surface adds to the pleasure and efficiency of sewing, home study or a hobby. Comfortable chairs and a sofa grouped in a semi-circle are comfortable for conversation. Group furniture according to the way it will be used.

5. Arrangement can determine function.
   Furniture can often function as a divider or partition between different areas. Bookcases, cabinets and chests are often finished on back and front so they can be seen from all sides. Much of today's modular furniture can be stacked and added according to need and use.

6. Create a spacious look.
   When rooms are small, your problem is to make them seem as large as possible. Items of furniture should be kept to a minimum. Lightweight pieces with slender legs and open arms give a feeling of spaciousness. Arrange furniture close to the walls to leave floor space open. Avoid too many small accessories. A large mirror carefully hung can work wonders in increasing the apparent size of a room.

7. Harmony of scale, line and color contributes more to unity than choice of specific furniture styles.
   Almost any styles of furniture can be combined if the pieces have a common unity of character or form. In the final analysis, color is the element that may determine the success of the combination.

   The total room should reflect thoughtful use of the elements of good design. Tying lines together is important. Not all surfaces should be the same height, but some uniformity does contribute to the feeling of harmony. Furniture lines should have a pleasing relationship to the architectural features, such as doors, mantels and windows. Arrangement of furniture also helps to carry out the general feeling or character you wish to achieve.

Good Design In Arrangement

Balance—Heavy pieces of furniture and dominant colors must be distributed so that no one area is over-emphasized. Groupings within the room should also balance. A combination of formal and informal balance is usually pleasing.

Scale and Proportion—Each piece of furniture should be proportioned to suit the room, the space it will occupy in the room and the other furniture. This does not always mean one should select large furniture for large rooms and small furniture for small rooms. For example, a full-length sofa in a small room looks more spacious than would three or four separate chairs.

Poor proportion in a room can often be improved by the way furniture is arranged. A long, narrow room, for instance, will appear better proportioned if heavier furniture is placed at the ends.

Contrast or Emphasis—Eye appeal is achieved by use of variety in shape, size, color and texture. Some high and some low furniture adds interest. Likewise, a combination of some straight and some curved lines is more pleasing than either one alone.

Unity—Proper application of the principles of balance, proportion and contrast should result in a blending effect—a feeling that each part belongs to the whole.
Grateful acknowledgement is given for critique of manuscript by panel members of Southern Furniture Manufacturers' Association and by Miss Elizabeth Hathaway, Professor of Home Economics of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The art work was provided by S. F. M. A.

Prepared by Mrs. Lillie B. Little and Mrs. Edith McGlamery
Extension Housing and Home Furnishings Specialists


10M—6-69