

8. THE LIVING ROOM



OVERVIEW

In the module, we look at the factors that make the living room a desirable place.

FUNCTIONS OF THE LIVING ROOM

The living room has many purposes. Here are some of them:

- Have a relaxed one-to-one conversation with your partner
- Hold a get-together with friends
- Sit and read quietly
- Watch television or a video
- Listen to music
- Pursue a hobby (such as jigsaws)
- Children's playroom

EXERCISE 8.1

Tick all boxes above that apply to your living room. Then add below any other activities that take place in your living room. Take several days to complete this exercise – you may not notice what people do in the room.

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-
-
-
-

Noting what people do in a living room may sound simplistic, but it is a good discipline. It reminds us that we have to design the room so that it provides space for all these activities.

10 FACTORS THAT IMPROVE THE DESIGN OF YOUR LIVING ROOM

1. Make sure the main activities can be carried out comfortably. The room should be organised so that you can do all the activities

comfortably. The shape of your room may limit you, but planning the main elements, such as the location of the TV and the traffic flow, will help to make your room more enjoyable.

2. Reduce the dominance of the television. If you have space in your living room, the television should be banished to another room. You might put a portable in the dining room, for example, or in a spare bedroom, and encourage children to watch their programmes there.

Once it's switched on, the television is a dominant force in the room, and demands your attention. This can halt the conversation.

3. Move other activities to different rooms: Sometimes, too many activities take place in the living room. If so, why not move some of them to another room. For example, you may be able to move the PC to a space under the stairs.
4. Arrange the traffic flow efficiently. People should be able to sit and relax without others pushing past them to get to the phone or the kitchen. You can achieve this by arranging the furniture so that people can walk behind the sofas. Check how your sofas are arranged. Are they pushed against the wall? Does this mean that people have no option but to walk through the middle of the room, interrupting the conversation?



This town house living room dates back to the 1600s, and has a stone inglenook fireplace. Low lighting contributes to a cosy atmosphere, and two sofas opposite each other simply invite you to sit down. The family has exposed the ceiling beams, and also did away with a hall, to make the room larger.

5. Make sure there's a place for your guest's coffee cup. Is there a coffee table, occasional table, or nest of tables close at hand so that guests can put a cup of tea on them?
6. Organise the storage for television, hi-fi, books, videos and CDs. Some people like having their CDs on display, while others find that they always look messy. But adequate storage, whether on open shelves or behind closed cupboard doors, is essential. Some storage units will take all your music and video equipment, while others are more specialised (for example racks for CDs). You will have to decide which you want, and in what style. Styles range from high-tech black wire units to traditional-looking pine units.

Hi-fi units often look messy, with lots of trailing wires. It is best to hide them away in a cupboard, unless you have a minimal one.
7. Have different parts of the room for competing activities. Maybe one person uses the PC while someone else watches television? If so, you could create different areas in the room. For example, at one end of the room you could have a table where the children can do homework. This would be far enough away to reduce the distraction from the television.
8. Make sure the room is big enough. If your room is small, consider knocking two rooms into one. Or swap rooms about, so that your living room is the biggest room in the house. If you re-name it your 'family room', you might decide to give it more space.
9. Relieve the eye by adding pictures and mirrors. Mirrors greatly add to the light in a room, and the view they reflect gives us something new to look at. Pictures and wall hangings make a room feel more lived in, and less stark. Make sure that the colours in your pictures harmonise with your colour scheme.
10. Put newspapers and magazines in a magazine rack. Or hide them under the sofa cushions. This is a surprisingly good place to keep them

FOUR WAYS TO GIVE YOUR ROOM MORE STYLE

1. Co-ordinate the colours. Make sure that the colour scheme is in harmony. You can have bright or restful colours, but they should be related to each other. See Module on matching colours. You will probably have to keep some items in the room, possibly the carpet and the sofa. Work on matching everything else in the

room to those colours. You can more easily change pictures or the colour of your curtains.

2. Get rid of the clutter. Hide away all the messy objects. Get rid of unnecessary ornaments and mess.
3. Organise a focal point. The focal point of a living room is often the fireplace. Some houses from the 1960s lack a fireplace, while 1950s houses often have small drab tiles. So don't be afraid to throw out an ugly fireplace, and install something more elegant. Black cast iron wood-burning stoves often make an attractive focal point, and wood is a cleaner fuel than coal.

If you don't have a fireplace, you can mock one up. The simplest solution is to add a timber fire surround, something you can buy at any big DIY store. You'll need to paint the wall black where the fire would go. Alternatively, get a builder or handyman to build a 'chimney breast' out of plasterboard, and then stick a fireplace on to it. You can add a grate from an architectural antiques yard. Another solution is to add a realistic looking gas fire, again inside a fireplace.

4. Display your treasures. Nice carpets and wallpaper may announce that you're a person of taste, but they don't say much about your personality. Most of us gather objects that have emotional value, such as family photos. And many of us gather objects we enjoy looking at, whether driftwood from the beach or a painting. These should be on display, without making the room look like a junk yard.

Objets d'art should be grouped, rather than placed on every surface, and they should be limited in quantity, or you will seem indiscriminating. We discuss this further in Module 15 Wall Decorations and Module 22 Display.

EXERCISE 8.2

List the items that are stored in your room (for example, books or newspapers). Write down how each is stored. If necessary, decide how this should be improved.

	Item	Current storage	Planned improvement
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			

PROBLEMS OF SCALE IN THE LIVING ROOM

Sometimes a living room looks too crowded. This can be because there is too much furniture, or because it is too large.

You can get rid of some furniture (for example, by having just a sofa and an armchair, instead of a three-piece suite). You can get new, smaller furniture. Or you can position the furniture differently.

Try drawing your room on graph paper (on a scale of 1:20), cutting out squares and rectangles in the shape and size of your furniture (also on 1:20), and moving them around to see if they will fit better using a different layout. This avoids having to push furniture around the room.

If you plan to buy new furniture, you can cut out the size quoted in the company's brochure, and move the rectangle around on your plan. This will help you check that the furniture is the right size for your room.

To make more space, you can use collapsible furniture that is only brought out when you have guests. For example, you can have a

painting table or a trestle table (covered with a tablecloth, they are indistinguishable from any other table).

To read the rest of the Living Room module you'll have to enroll! But below is the assignment that you'd undertake in Module 8.

ASSIGNMENT FOR MODULE 8

Describe your living room (or someone else's). Draw a floor plan, showing its length and width, as discussed in Module 6.

Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the room. Describe its colour scheme and décor.

Dream up a new colour scheme for your room. Put together a sample board. *[Note to visitor: we cover Sample Boards in an earlier module]*

When you are satisfied, send or email it to your tutor together with your comments.

When you're ready to return to the website, click your Back button.