No Rules—Just Fun

Decorating

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No Rules — Just Fun Decorating

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Printed in the United States of America

Table of Contents

Introduction

No Rules—Just Fun Decorating

After teaching basic decorating classes for years, using the same tedious methods I was taught as an interior decorator, I realized my students were overwhelmed by all the details.

They cringed at the thought of drawing a "to scale" floor plan and found it difficult to envision their furniture in the form of "to scale" paper cutouts which, in theory, should be easier to arrange on paper rather than dragging their full-size furniture around the room until they achieved an acceptable arrangement.

Even though I explained repeatedly that the lessons in balance, traffic patterns and color schemes were merely guidelines, not unbreakable rules, they still obsessed over following each one without regard for their true preferences.

The purpose for creating a beautiful and functional living space is to reduce our stress—not add to it during the decorating process. I realized my students were suffering from decorating anxiety, and I felt guilty for adding to their distress.

So I tossed out all the rules and decided to take a new approach. That's why I developed the "no rules—just fun" decorating concept.

My mission was to convince my students, as well as my clients, that decorating choices are not life or death decisions and needn't be treated with such gravity.

There are no wrong choices. The goal is to create a space that makes you happy, based on your own personal style— not popular trends or someone else's opinions.

I was amazed at how positively my students responded to this new approach. And my decorating consultations became more fun, as well.

Your home should be a comfortable, enjoyable retreat where you can escape from the hectic world outside. Decorate your home using items you love—things that will add joy to your life each time you see them. This should be your goal for all your design projects.

No Rules – Just Fun Decorating offers practical suggestions for common decorating problems that might be causing trouble in your living spaces. If you aren't happy with the current state of your décor, or feel that your rooms aren't quite "working", keep reading. You might just find the answers to your decorating dilemmas in the next few chapters.

This book includes helpful hints, money saving tips and fun ideas to help make your rooms more functional, as well as more beautiful, using whatever budget you choose. In many cases, you can give your home a complete new look just by rearranging the furniture and accessories you already own.

Forget the rules—just have fun!

A Room Without a Cause
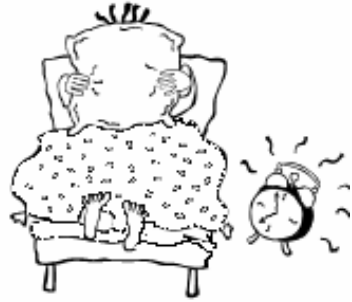
Many times a room isn't "working" for us because we simply haven't thought about how we need it to function; therefore, the room doesn't have the appropriate furniture or lighting to meet our needs.

Do you long for a comfortable chair with sufficient light in your bedroom for reading? Do you desperately need more seating in your living room to accommodate guests? Where could you possibly squeeze in a desk for computer work? Don't live with the frustration of doing without—fix the problem. Before starting any new decorating project, take the time to decide how you need the space to function.

This task isn't complicated. You don't need to fill out lengthy "lifestyle questionnaire" forms. It just takes some thought. If you plan to redecorate the living room, take a few moments to decide what activities you'll be doing in the space. Will you be watching television? Do you need a comfortable conversation area for entertaining? How many people will you need to accommodate for seating?

Would you also like to have a comfortable reading area separate from the main seating group? Do you have enough space to include a game table or writing desk in the room, as well? Creating rooms with multiple functions is a great way to make more efficient use of your space.

Follow this same process for designing a dining room. Think about your entertainment needs for parties, dinner guests and holiday events. How many people are involved? Is the event usually formal or casual? How often do you hold each type of gathering?

For your bedrooms, consider how many people you need to accommodate in each room. Do your kids need a desk for homework or do they need more storage for toys? Do you want to use one of your bedrooms for a home office? Would the office also need to function as a guest bedroom?

Taking the time to consider the functional needs for your design project will help you decide what furniture pieces and lighting you'll need. Make a list of these items. Then, simply remove any pieces of furniture that don't meet your functional needs and replace them with ones that work.

Are you planning to do an interior re-design, where you'll be using the furniture and accessories you already own, or do you plan to purchase all new pieces or just a few new items? If you're doing an interior re-design, scour your entire house to find furniture and lighting that will help make your room more functional. If you want to add new furniture, you'll have a list of the pieces you need to buy.

Most of us have limited space in our homes, so it's important to use the space we have efficiently. Don't just "make do" with the current condition of your living areas. Take the time to figure out how you need your rooms to function and make them "work" for you!

Helpful Hints:

- If you want to add a new piece of furniture to your room, be sure to measure the space where you plan to place it to make sure it will fit. AND don't forget to measure the doors into your house and project room to make sure you can get the piece inside. If you plan to purchase a tall piece of furniture, measure the ceiling height in your room, as well.

- If your home office is small and needs to function as both an office and a guest bedroom, consider getting a daybed with a pull-out trundle bed underneath. It will provide sleeping space for two people and takes up less space than a sofa bed.

- If your formal dining room is rarely ever used, consider making it a multi-functional room. With the appropriate storage units, it can also be a home office or hobby room. The dining table can be your desk or hobby table and the buffet or hutch can hide your computer, printer or hobby supplies.

Money-Saving Tip:

- If you're crafty, scout garage sales, flea markets and second-hand stores for furniture and lighting that might meet your needs, then refinish, paint or recover the items to match your décor.

Fun Idea:

- After you've selected the furniture and lighting you want to include in your room, you'll need to decide how to arrange it in the space, which requires considerable muscle power.

  This can be a fun family project, so recruit all the able-bodied members. Your kids will learn greater appreciation for the effort it takes to create a cozy home after they've moved that sofa six times—or as long as it takes until you're satisfied it's in the right spot!
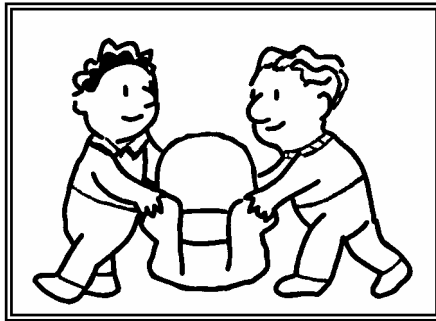
What's the Point?
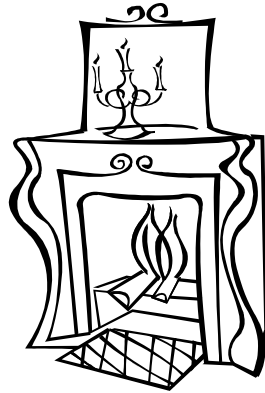
When planning your design project, make an effort to highlight a beautiful architectural feature in the room or create an attractive vignette on one of the walls, which can serve as the room's focal point. It will make the time you spend there more enjoyable, and that is, after all, what decorating is about—adding more beauty to our lives.

The focal point can be a fireplace with attractive decorations above the mantel, a window with a beautiful view, artwork arranged over a sofa, or even an entertainment center (if the main function of the room is watching television instead conversation).

If you have a room with a beautiful view, make it the focal point of your room. Arrange the furniture to draw attention toward it. Frame the window with drapery panels or fabric swags and position a tall plant or topiary on either side of the window to help make it stand out, as shown in the drawing on page 8.
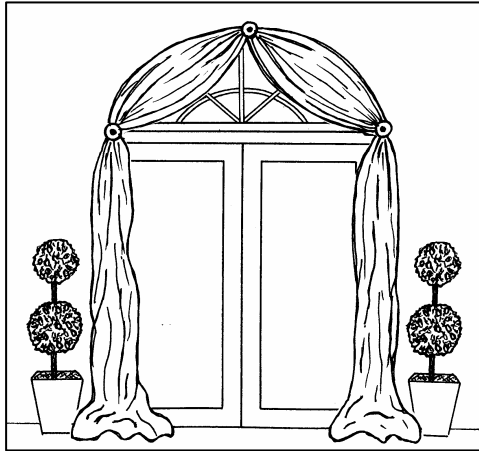
If the fireplace is an attractive architectural feature in your living room, orient your furniture toward it. In the furniture layout below (Figure 1), the sofa is facing the fireplace, with two upholstered chairs across from it, creating a comfortable conversation area.
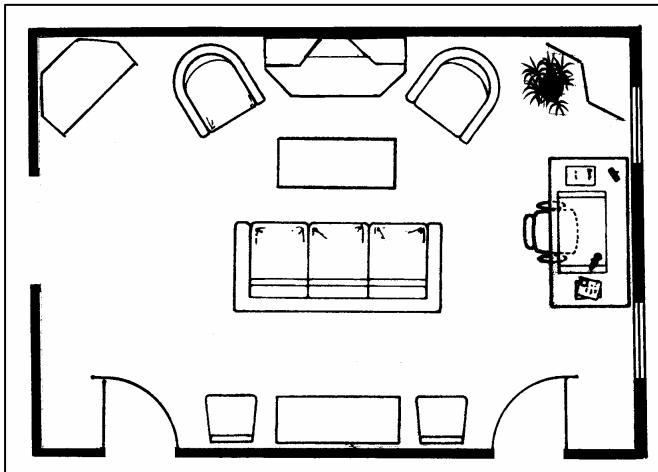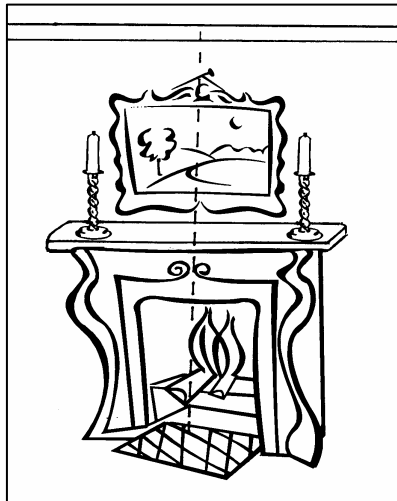

Figure 1

The focal point of any room should create sufficient impact to draw your attention. When using the fireplace as the focal point, arrange a group of accessories, such as framed mirrors, paintings, vases, candles and other objects on or over the mantle in order to create a pleasing composition and make your focal point stand out.

Try to make the composition large enough in scale and extended high enough on the wall above the mantel shelf to establish its importance. How do you know if your arrangement works? Just stand back and observe. Does the composition appear pleasing and relatively balanced? Does it create enough of an impact to draw your attention? As long as you're happy with the results and you've taken the time to check the overall impact, then go with it!

 A good example for an arrangement above a fireplace mantle is a large painting hung above the mantel shelf, in the center, and two identical candlesticks placed on either side of the painting. See Figure 2 below.
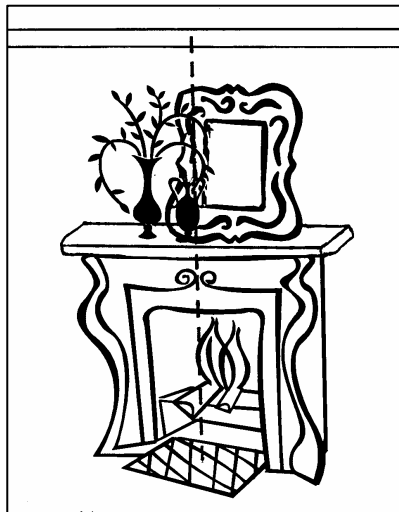

Figure 2

It isn't necessary to use a perfectly symmetrical arrangement of accessories (known as "formal balance") over your fireplace mantle, as in the example in Figure 2. This type of composition creates a formal, traditional look.

You can also create a more casual arrangement (called "informal balance") from a group of objects of varying sizes and shapes. With this type of arrangement, you'll need to do some experimenting with different combinations of objects until you feel the balance looks right.

An example of informal balance is a large framed mirror placed on the mantel shelf, slightly off center, which is balanced by a vase filled with a tall floral arrangement.

It takes a bit more time and effort to arrange the objects in this type of composition, but the result creates a more dynamic feel, rather than the static mood of traditional, formal balance. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Painting an accent wall in a darker or more vibrant color is another way to make your focal point stand out. For example, if your focal point is a fireplace which has wood trim and a mantle shelf that are painted white, and your room is painted a neutral beige color, then painting the wall that the fireplace is on with a darker shade of beige (or one of your accent colors in the room, such as blue) will draw the eye to that wall. It will also make the fireplace "pop" because of the white paint of the wood trim against the darker wall color. Placing any object in front of a sharply contrasting color makes it more visible.

If you don't have a fireplace in your living room, you can create a focal point by arranging decorative objects and artwork over a sofa or an attractive piece of furniture, such as a chest or entry table. Painting an accent wall in a contrasting color behind these arrangements will also create more impact for your focal point.
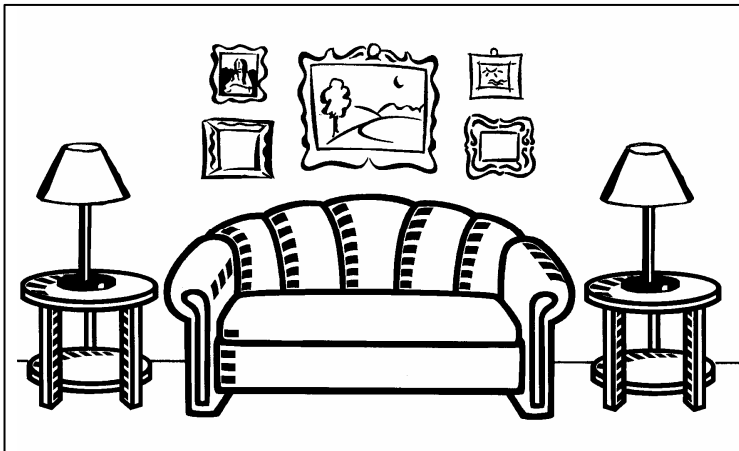
Focal points shouldn't be reserved for the living room only. Have fun experimenting with arrangements in other rooms in your home, as well, to create attractive vignettes you can enjoy throughout your house.

A few possibilities are listed below:

- Hang a group of decorative plates and serving platters over a sideboard in your dining room. Flank the arrangement with buffet lamps or candlesticks on each end of the sideboard to highlight the arrangement, as shown in the drawing below.
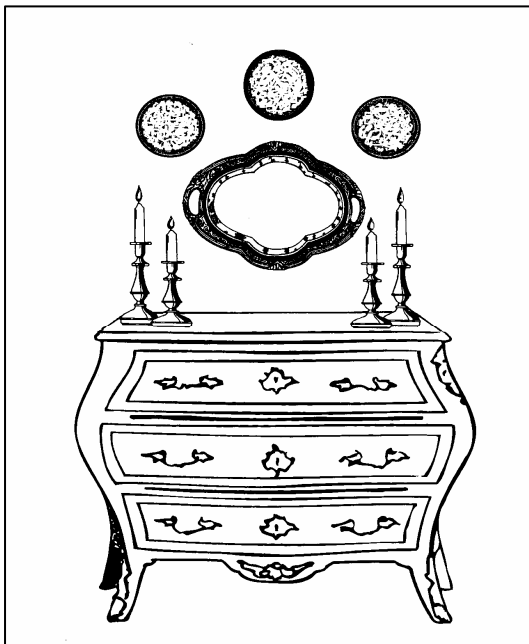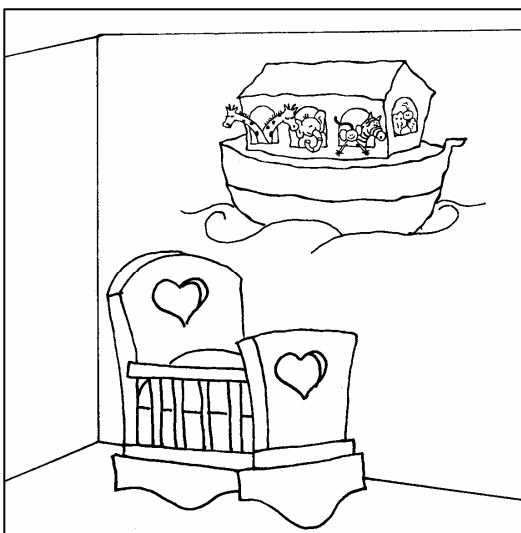
- Hang curtain panels gathered onto a curtain rod behind the headboard of your bed to create an attractive focal point in your bedroom.
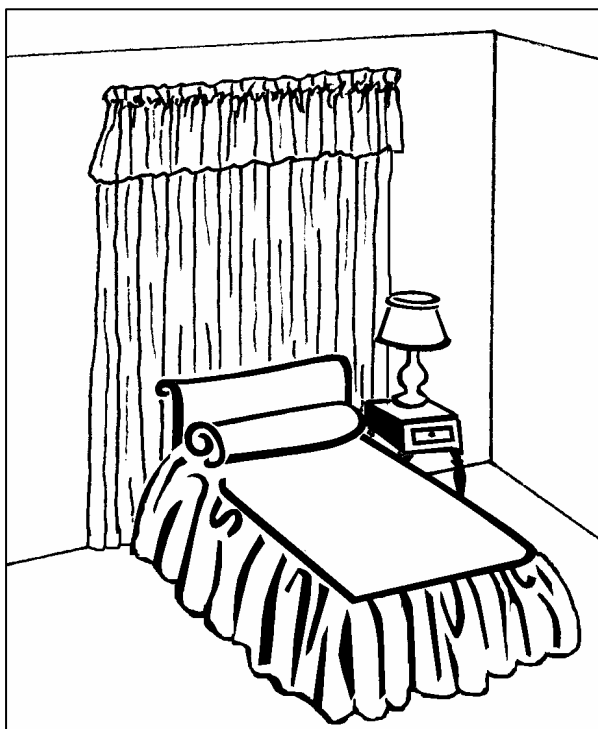
- Paint a wall mural in your child's nursery or playroom depicting one or more favorite book characters or a design from the bedding. See the instructions below for painting decorative designs on walls, furniture, cabinets and more.

Choose a focal point for each of your rooms, whether it's a prominent architectural feature, a window with an attractive view or an arrangement of artwork over a piece of furniture, and create a beautiful composition for you and your guests to enjoy.

Decorative Painting Instructions

Personalizing your home with hand painted murals and other designs is not only fun, but easy and inexpensive. Want a window with a view? Paint one. Can't afford that expensive tapestry for your wall? Paint one.

Painting scenes on your walls, floors, furniture, doors and cabinets is as easy as coloring in a coloring book. Just find the design you want, trace it onto tracing paper, enlarge it on a copy machine and transfer it to the surface you want to paint.

You can also use an opaque projector for very large designs to project the image onto the wall surface and trace it. Then fill in the traced design with acrylic paints.

There are hundreds of painting books and magazines that feature design patterns. These books will also tell you what color paints to purchase and give you painting directions to complete your design.

You can also find designs in coloring books and children's books. For a customized decorating look, copy the designs on your upholstery fabric, curtains, bedding or wallpaper and paint them on your walls or furniture. The possibilities for hand painted designs are unlimited.

Preparing the Surface:

The first step in any painting project is to prepare the surface properly. If you're painting a scene on a textured drywall surface (typical in most homes), be sure the wall is freshly painted with wall paint that has a "flat finish". The acrylic paints that you will be using to paint your design won't adhere to a shiny surface such as high-gloss or semi-gloss paint. A light background color on the walls is best.

If you're painting on a wooden surface with a shiny finish, such as furniture, cabinets or doors, first wash the surface to remove any dirt or grease. Use a damp (not soaking) cloth moistened with a solution of water and detergent. Let dry.

Next sand the surface lightly with a fine grit sandpaper and remove any dust with a damp paper towel. Then apply a coat of primer and let dry thoroughly.

Lightly sand the surface again, remove any dust, and apply the desired color of paint for your base coat (the background color for your painted design). Let the base coat dry thoroughly before tracing your design onto the surface.