

Instantly Elevate Your Home by Avoiding These Seven Common Mistakes



[Deborah Nicholson Interiors](#)

Hello and *thank you!*

We're so glad you downloaded our *Design Style Guide* and we're going to guess there might be *something* about your home that's falling flat.

Maybe it's:

- a room that doesn't feel finished
- the lack of cohesiveness throughout your home
- a nagging feeling that something is *off* but you can't quite place your finger on it

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

After working inside clients' homes since 2008, we can instantly spot what's missing, or what's currently throwing the whole thing off. Sometimes it's a simple fix; other times it's a bit more complex and layered.

We design rooms for people who want to relax when they get home — not wander the house scratching their heads thinking "this room needs something...". When you have unfinished projects in your home, or rooms that just don't feel *right*, it creates an open loop in your brain which adds another to-do to your list and another layer of stress. Tackling it on your own can take up a lot of time and mental space, and the "buy-and-return" game as we famously call it, is oftentimes more expensive than getting design help from day one.

WITH THIS GUIDE, YOU CAN PRETEND WE'RE WALKING WITH YOU FROM ROOM TO ROOM, POINTING OUT THE SMALL (OR BIG) FIXES THAT WILL INSTANTLY GIVE YOUR HOME THAT FINISHED, COHESIVE, DESIGNER LOOK YOU DESERVE.

We're committed to helping our clients create unique and inviting spaces so they can focus their precious time on the people and activities they love most. It all starts with a solid foundation, and by avoiding the mistakes in this *Design Style Guide*, you'll be well on your way.

Thank you for inviting our ideas and advice into your home. We can't wait to see how these simple changes will elevate your everyday life. In fact we would love for you to share your before and after photos with us at mail@deborahnicholson.ca There's never a charge for sharing your design triumphs. :-)

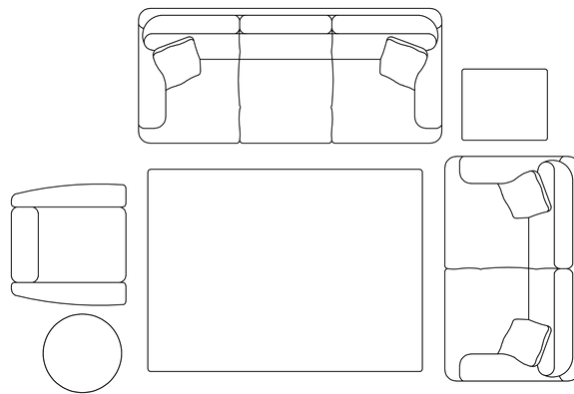


NO. 1

Your rug is too small.

The #1 issue we see in homes is rugs that are way too small for the space.

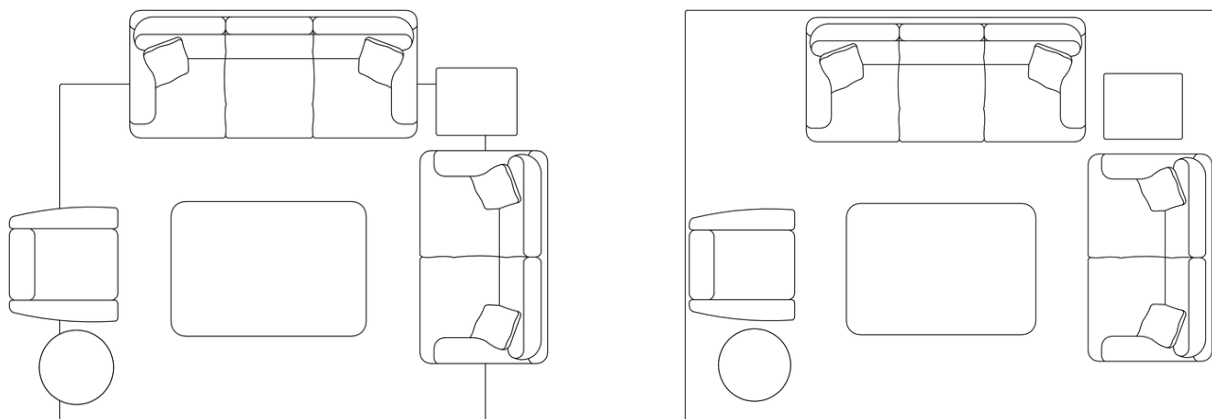
A rug that is “floating” in the center of the room without a sofa or chair anchoring it is simply too small. It looks like a postage stamp in the middle of a room and doesn’t command sufficient visual interest. Nor does it adequately create the stage for your furniture to sit on.



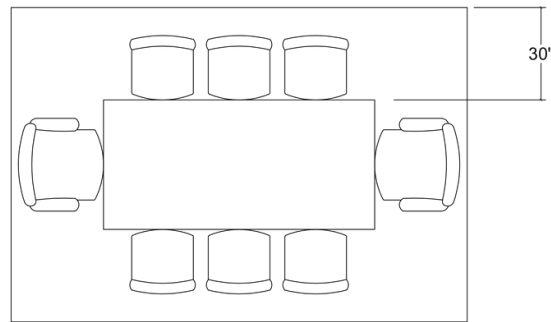
The guideline for a seating grouping which might include a sofa and other upholstered pieces is either:

- all front legs of furniture sit ON the rug, and the back legs sit OFF the rug, or,
- both the front and back legs of furniture sit ON the rug

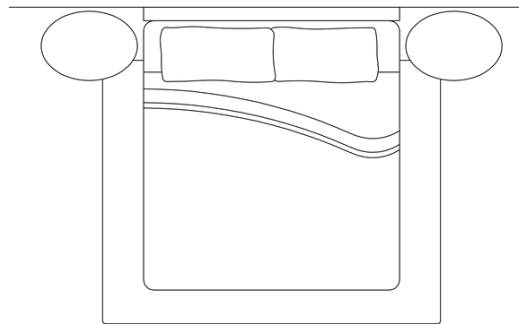
If you're shopping for a rug to go under existing furniture, and want to determine the correct size – measure from about the center point of the upholstered furniture, or from the back of your upholstered furniture. The images below show correctly sized rugs for a furniture grouping:



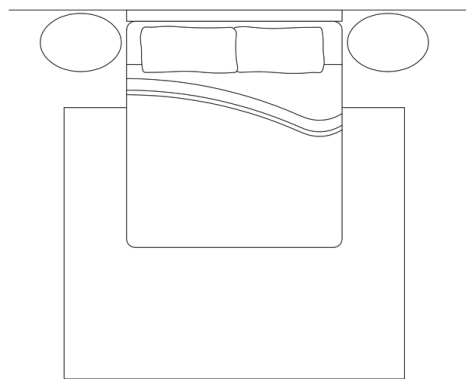
In a dining room, all chair legs should be on the rug, as it is awkward to sit on or adjust a chair that is half-on, half-off an area rug. This means when the chair is pulled out from under the table, all the legs are on the rug.



In a bedroom, make sure more of the rug is out from under the bed than is hidden under it. The example here shows a waste of a good rug, as most of it is hidden beneath the bed.



Bring more of the rug out from under the bed and use a slightly larger rug, like the next image. The ideal for rugs under beds is that when you step out of bed in the morning, your feet should touch the rug, not the cold hardwood/tile.



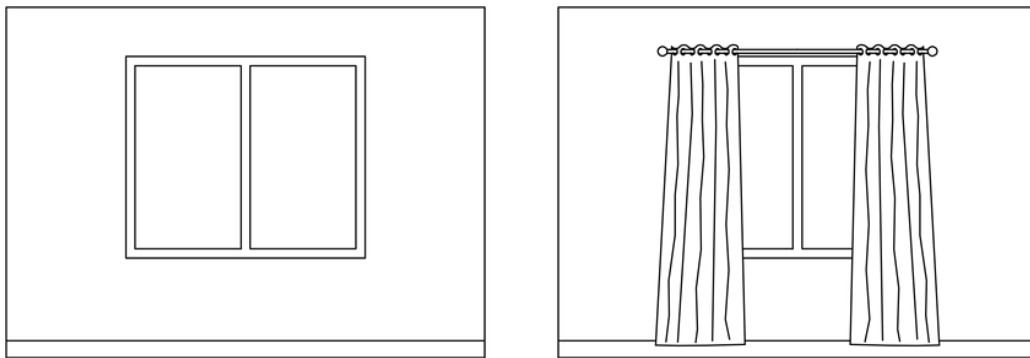
PRO TIP: Add a rug pad under every area rug to extend the life of the rug and to add a more luxurious feel underfoot. Our favorite for living spaces is a ¼" to ½" felt pad. Just make sure adjacent doors can still swing open without getting stuck on a too-high rug + rug pad. The pad should be sized or cut to be 1" to 2" shorter than the rug in both directions.

NO. 2

Your drapes are
hung too low.

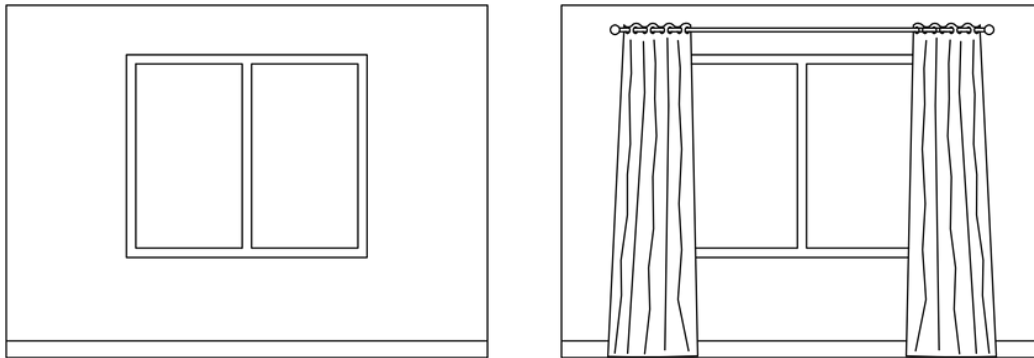


Another common mistake we see is drapery rods that are hung too low, and drapery panels that are too short, making both the window and the room appear much smaller.



Drapery panels should be hung high and wide to make windows appear larger and ceilings appear higher. Drapery rods should extend a foot or so beyond the window trim and should be hung approximately halfway between the top of the window trim and the ceiling.

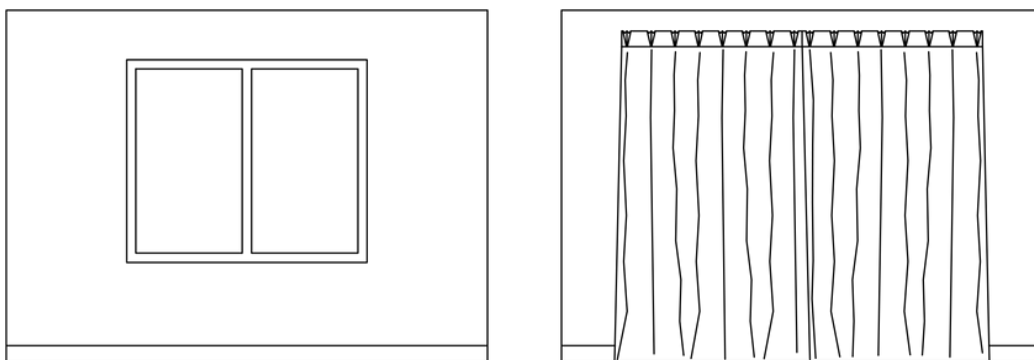
On the same window, the draperies below have the correct scale for this window, making everything appear more expansive.



Drapery rods should be longer than the width of the window by a foot or more on both sides, so that the panels sit in front of the wall, just covering the sides of the window trim. The length should be just a hair above the flooring. When ordering pre-made panels, it is best to purchase them longer and then hire a seamstress to hem them to the proper length.

For traversing draperies, before being pleated or gathered, the drapery width should measure 2 to 2.5 times the width of the window plus the distance where the draperies will extend past the window and over the wall.

For example: if a window is 60" wide, and draperies will sit in front of the wall 20" on either side of the window, the total finished width will be 100". Therefore, the width of the drapery before pleating or gathering should be 200" to 250". This ensures that when the draperies are pulled closed over the window, they still have ample fullness and a rich appearance.



PRO TIP: It is well worth the additional expense—whether ordering or having custom-made—to get draperies that are lined. Not only does lining enhance the fullness and visual depth of the draperies, it also protects drapery fabric from sun and moisture damage, enhances light-blocking and privacy, and creates a unified look when viewed from the exterior of your home (assuming you do white or off-white lining on all your draperies).

NO. 3

Your artwork is *waaaaay* too high.

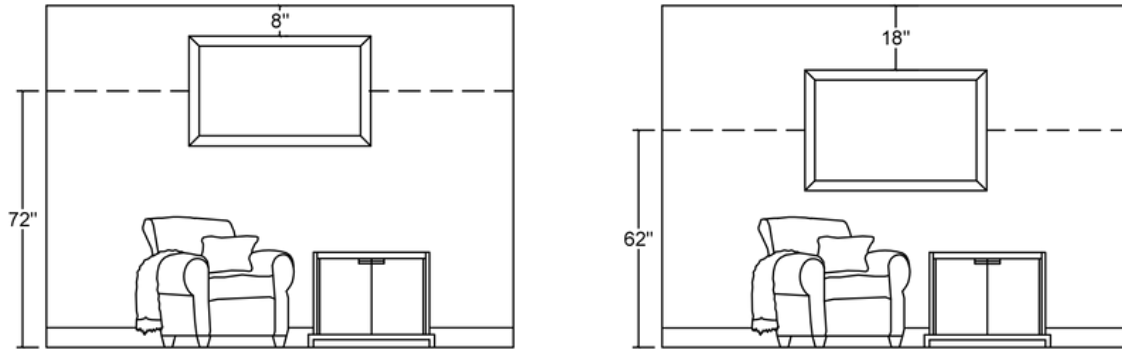


The third most common mistake we see everywhere we go (seriously — even at the doctor’s office we’re tempted to move the artwork down while we’re waiting to see the doctor) is artwork that is hung way too high!

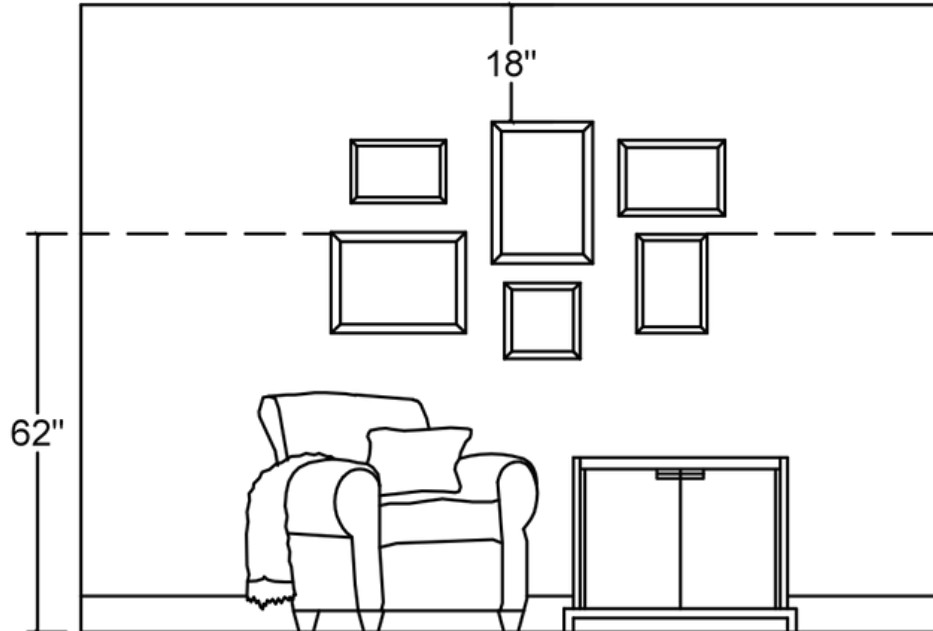
Art should be hung so the vertical center of the piece is 58” to 64” above the ground. This is at eye height for average adults. An average height woman is 5’4” or 64”, an average man is 5’8” or 68” tall, and our eyes are 4” to 5” below the tops of our heads.

Art should be sized and hung so that no part of it is within one foot of the ceiling. Below left, the artwork is hung too high, less than 1' from the ceiling, and with a vertical centerline at 72" which is well above the eye height of most people.

At right, the artwork is hung at the appropriate height and creates a better composition with the furnishings near it.

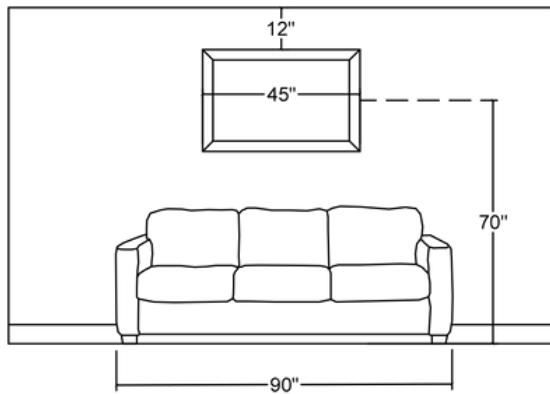


A collection of art, like a gallery wall, should be treated as one piece with the vertical center of the entire installation at 58" to 64" from the ground, and a minimum of 12" down from the ceiling. The spacing between each piece in the grouping should be a minimum of 2".

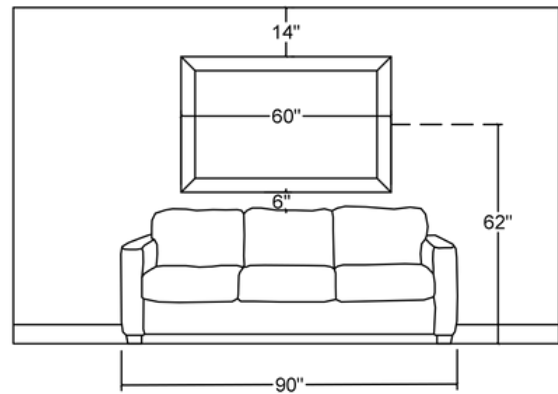


Art above a sofa or table should be hung so the bottom of the piece is at least 6" above the top of the piece of furniture. Make sure that the scale of the art is sufficient to work with the scale of the furniture piece below it. A good measurement to go by is artwork should be about two-thirds the width of the furniture.

In the image below, the scale of the artwork is undersized, at only half the width of the sofa, and is incorrectly hung above eye level.



The proportion in the image below is much more pleasing, with an art piece that is two-thirds the width of the sofa.



PRO TIP: If there is window trim or door trim near your art, be sure to hang the art so the top of the frame is a few inches below the top of the trim.





NO. 4

Your furniture scale is off.

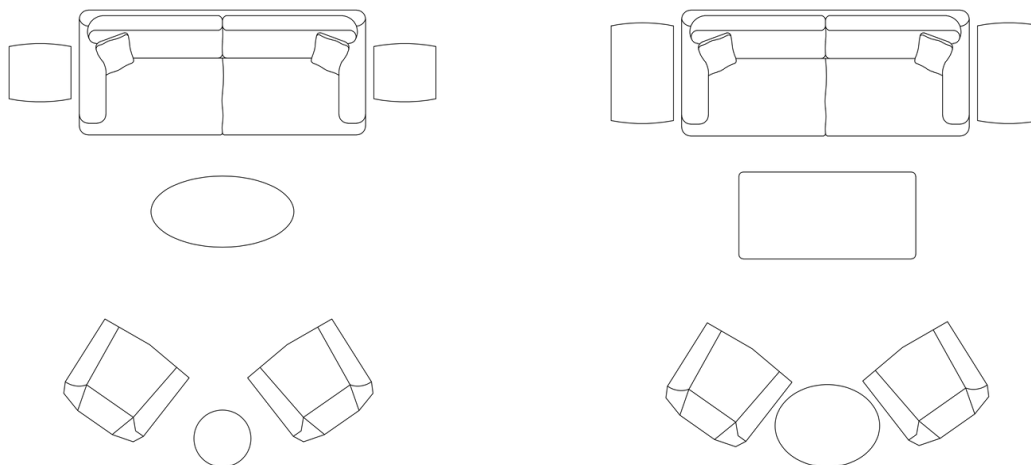
Another HUGE mistake we see is furniture that is not the correct scale for the space. (And this is why we always start every project with a to-scale furniture layout so we know what will work spatially in a room. Then alllllll furniture selections are based on that floor plan).

Your furniture has to have the correct scale in relation to the size of the room. Smaller rooms will need smaller furniture whereas larger rooms allow for larger, deeper, higher furniture.

More often than not, we see furniture that is simply too small for a space, or too small in relation to other nearby furniture pieces. This makes a space feel unfinished and unintentional as if the furniture was placed haphazardly.

Having properly sized, well-proportioned furniture is KEY to an elevated design.

In the left furniture grouping, the occasional pieces (the term for coffee tables, end tables, and the like) are just too small for the overall arrangement of furniture. The scale is not right. By including larger pieces (at right), the overall composition is more cohesive and the look is definitely more elevated.



PRO TIP: Always start with a furniture layout, even if that means sketching out a to-scale floor plan on graph paper. Never purchase a piece of furniture without first looking at a scaled plan showing how it will look in your room.

NO. 5

You're missing layers of lighting.



Think of a school classroom - overhead fluorescent lighting, with all areas very evenly illuminated. That is NOT what you want in your home. Residential spaces are far more interesting when they have varying levels of lighting throughout - pools of light falling on important furniture pieces and on artwork, with less important areas of the space receiving lower light levels.

Every room should have three levels of light:

1. *Overhead lighting (think recessed can lights, flush or semi-flush ceiling fixtures, chandeliers, pendants)*
2. *Accent lighting (think art lights, wall sconces, uplighting, track lighting, or directional recessed)*
3. *Task lighting (think floor lamps and table lamps near where you read, under-cabinet lighting in your kitchen)*

This multi-layered approach will ensure a more sophisticated AND functional lighting scheme.

We also see (can you guess?) ceiling light fixtures (flush-mount, semi-flush, and chandeliers) that are too small for a space. When light fixtures are too small and not well proportioned, they actually cheapen the look of the fixture and the room. GASP! We don't want that!!!

Our handy formula for selecting a ceiling-mounted fixture is:

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{LENGTH OF ROOM IN FEET} + \text{WIDTH OF ROOM IN FEET} \\ &= \text{HOW WIDE FIXTURE SHOULD BE IN INCHES} \end{aligned}$$

Example:

A room that is 15' x 15' should have a ceiling fixture that is 30" wide.

A room that is 12' x 20' should have a ceiling fixture that is 32" wide (or two light fixtures).

How high to hang a chandelier or pendant light? If you are hanging a chandelier over a dining room table, the bottom-most part of the fixture should be about 30" - 34" above the top of the table. The same rule applies if hanging above a kitchen island or peninsula.

PRO TIP: There are two important tips regarding lighting in your home. First, use dimmer switches wherever you can. It is well worth hiring an electrician to swap out standard switches for dimmers. That will allow you to adjust illumination levels to be lower and more intimate in the evening.

Secondly, when shopping for replacement light bulbs for your lamps and light fixtures, look for a Kelvin number (Kelvin - the measurement of color temperature - this will be marked on the light bulb packaging) of 3000. This will be warm light - more pleasing and more flattering to our skin tones. A higher Kelvin number (4000+) will be very cool and blue-ish in tone. NOT nearly as nice. Also look for a Colour Rendering Index (CRI) of 90 or higher for true colour representation. Remember those florescent lights in school where everything looked greenish-grey? Those had a CRI of about 60-70. Yech!

NO. 6

There are too many little things.



It probably seems like we're picking on the little things...we promise we're not. It's just a mistake we see often in homes that contributes to a room looking unfinished.

When it comes to decorative pieces, larger-scale items simply feel more intentional. They make a statement. They command attention. They look sophisticated.

When you have lots of small-scale, delicate things clustered together in your space, your eye travels from thing to thing with no one place to focus. This gives the impression that the room is incomplete and ungrounded, with no focal point. It also makes a room feel cluttered (which is not elevated!).

Larger-scaled items (think: a two-foot tall vase on a table, not a six-inch one) command more visual interest and look more stylish.

Along with the appropriate scale, it is so important to also consider the number of decorative pieces in any space. Collecting accent items for our homes is enjoyable. Accessories complete the look and add character and visual interest. The problem is, using decorative pieces can easily be overdone. The adage “*Less is More*” really applies to the art of accessorizing well.

When adding these finishing touches to a room, think about grouping a few items together to create one focal point. A quantity of three items grouped together is particularly visually pleasing. Five items work well together as well (always go with odd numbers of items in a grouping). Vary the sizes and shapes of items within a grouping to add interest, balance, and cohesiveness.

So, when it comes to adding decorative objects to dress up a room: go bigger, go fewer, go with odd numbers, and group together.

Look through your rooms and see if you have lots of small things throughout. Is your space over-accessorized?? Reduce. Pair up. Or remove. You will see an instant positive result.

PRO TIP: Contrast is very important when choosing decorative objects. Select light or brightly colored items to go on a dark bookcase or table, and choose dark-toned items to sit on lighter furniture.



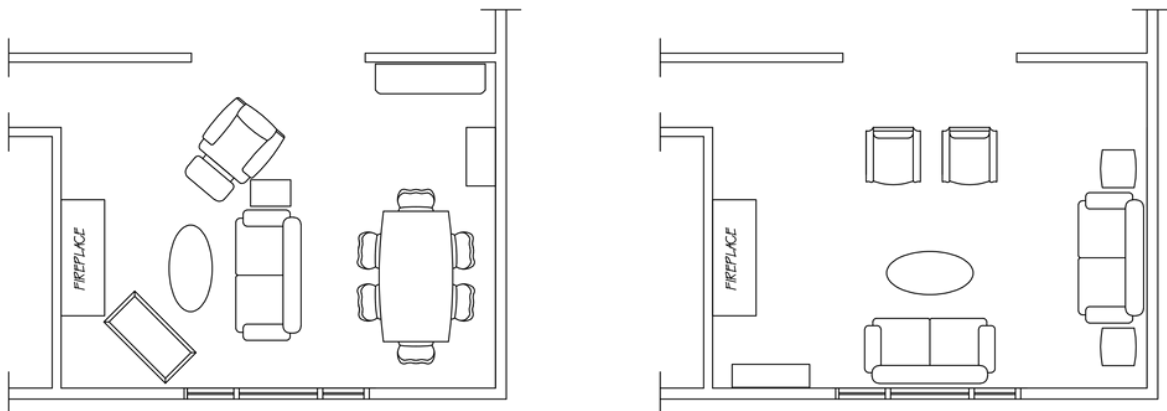
NO. 7

Your furniture needs some breathing room!

The quickest way to make furniture feel all wrong is to have it jammed together OR pushed up against a wall. *Don't mind me as I pull that sofa off the wall just an inch or two.*

This goes back to #4 (starting with a furniture layout) to make sure your furniture can breathe!

Below left, the furniture is packed in with every piece touching. Below right, the furniture is backed up against the walls - at the perimeter of the room. Neither of these layouts allows for social conversation, and neither seems intentional or purposeful.



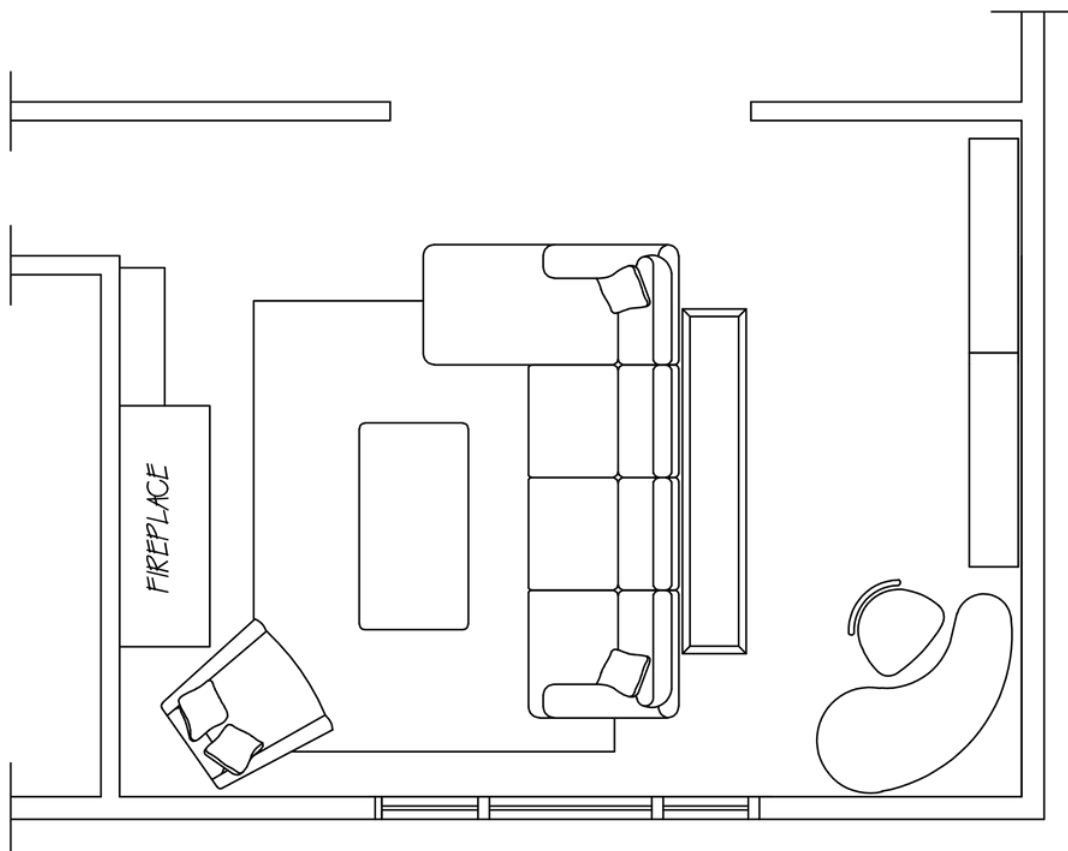
There are three important considerations to solve these poor layouts. First, key room elements should be centered with one another, along an imaginary center axis line. In the above layout on the left would be better if the sofa were centered in front of the fireplace.

Second, do not be afraid to float your largest furniture pieces, that is - bring sofas and other furniture away from the wall, and into the center of the space. An entire furniture grouping can sit away from all perimeter walls, provided there is ample space to walk around it.

Finally, allow breathing room within all your furniture arrangements. Except for bookcases and case goods, pull pieces several inches away from walls. Furniture pieces that are adjacent, such as a sofa and end table, should not touch — having 2” to 6” of spacing between them is ideal.

One area where people make the opposite mistake—placing items too far apart—is the coffee table in front of a sofa. There should be no more than 12” to 18” between their front edges. A coffee table is not functional if it’s out of reach from those seated nearby.

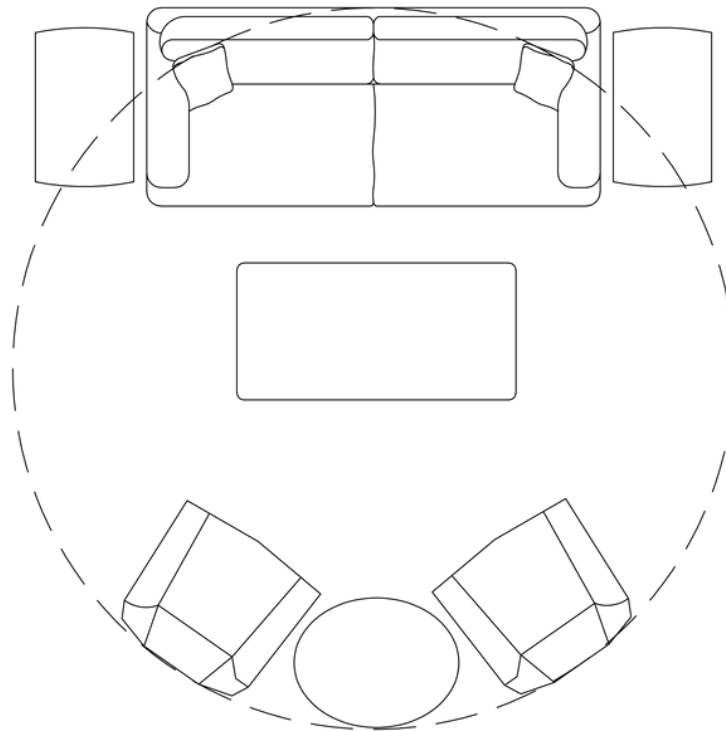
The layout below is a much more sophisticated and thoughtful furniture arrangement than the ones above, with logical and balanced furniture positioning.



Play with the placement of furniture pieces.

- How does it look if you pull a piece out just a bit from the wall?
- What happens when you move the coffee table a little bit closer to the sofa?
- What happens when you give the dining chairs some space? *Yes, that might mean you have to put a chair or two in another room until you need them.*

Does the room feel more intentional? More elevated? We're going to guess it does!



PRO TIP: When placing furniture to be both well proportioned and to facilitate social interaction, measure for an imaginary circle hitting the back sides of your upholstered pieces. The diameter of that circle should be about 12' to 13'.

We've reached the end of our Design Style Guide and we hope you've discovered *the thing* that's been throwing your whole room off.

But, that's only half the solution! Now it's time to solve it. We invite you to check out [our portfolio](#) to gather ideas and see these style tips implemented well, or you're welcome to reach out to us today to learn more about working together.

Scientific evidence supports what most of us instinctively know – our homes need to serve us with ease of living and they need to be beautiful, not magazine beautiful, but beautiful in how they express our joy and in how they hold the things and people that are dear to us.

Kind regards,



ABOUT Deborah Nicholson Interiors

We'll guide you towards the best choices to enhance the beauty and enjoyment of your home and add value to your investment. We can show you how minimal can be cozy, accessibility can be beautiful, and a skillful blend of well-loved, repurposed, eco-new, and hand-crafted will create a joyful home. With a focus on sustainability — of our planet and your resources — we know your choices will be good ones.

For more inspiration, follow us [@deborah_nicholson_interiors](#)
Learn more about working together [here](#).