

Well-planned space most important first step

One of the more "basic" jobs of a designer is space planning. It's less showy, less gratifying than choosing and placing the final furniture, finishes, flooring, fabrics and artwork, but if it's not right, if the foundation isn't laid, the overall design work can look pretty silly.

Space planning is all about function, particularly in the kitchen. Home trends come and go but, other than the overall size increases, the functions of a kitchen haven't change that much over the years. We still cook and



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eat in the kitchen, prepare the morning coffee, bake and entertain. What changes most are the cabinet styles, the appliances, the color schemes, fixtures, window styles and flooring.

The "work triangle" is at the heart of every well-designed kitchen. It's the placement of the refrigerator, stove/

oven and sink. Everything else is less important than these three elements and the distance that lies between them. I'm not saying the Kitchen Aid or cappuccino maker isn't important. But they aren't the foundation of the design the way the triangle is.

To put an island in the middle of the triangle, or to have one of the three work stations too close together creates a restriction in movement. A well designed kitchen has a fluid, well-edited floor plan. Beyond the triangle, you need ample counter space, not too

narrow, not too deep. You need several types of lighting. If you cook or entertain a lot, an additional sink can be nice.

Islands and bars have been popular items for some time. Many clients ask for islands in their overall designs, but if they're not well-thought-out or are too large, they can create problems.

I was working with an architect and builder a number of years ago on plans for the construction of a large

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mountain home. The architect had designed one of my least-favorite living spaces: the Great Room.

Right away I noticed the bar extended too far into the living/dining area leaving virtually no room for a dining room table and chairs. Fortunately we were able to cut down the depth of the bar to accommodate the dining room set, but the bar ended up looking skimpy. It was a trade-off. The architect made a mistake.

You can design a house on paper, but to make it livable, you need a strong sense of how people will actually place the furniture. In this case, instead of an over-scale curved bar dividing the kitchen from the dining area, a straight bar would have been more practical and attractive.

Space planning needs to be addressed before finalizing your plans. Placing the fireplace and built-ins obviously, but also knowing where the sofa and master bed will go, placing the windows, the doorways, the lighting and outlets: these things should be taken into account before plans are finalized.

In a recent project, I did two sets of floor plans for a living room. It was a spacious room with a beautiful stone fireplace and mantel, plenty of windows, vaulted ceilings, surrounded by beautiful landscaping. But laying out the furniture was a bit tricky because the fireplace was located almost at the end of a very long wall. It didn't leave a lot of room for seating around the fire.

I addressed this by drawing out plans with two separate seating areas. For the main seating area I proposed a 90-inch sofa, a cocktail table, console, built in bookcases, an armchair near the fireplace, and two more armchairs and an ottoman near the television.

In another home, the very large living room had lots of furniture but it was all small scale giving it a busy, unanchored look.

Large rooms need at least one strong anchor such as a fireplace with flanking built-in bookcases or a large hutch. By using one of these as an anchor you can further emphasize it as the main seating area with a sofa, two chairs and a cocktail table, or two love seats.

Once the main seating area is done properly, the other pieces will fall into place.

In my own living room, I've divided the space into two distinct seating areas. One is the main seating area with a floating sofa (meaning it's not against a wall, but centralized in the room), two floating armchairs, and a large enclosed hutch which is directly adjacent to the fireplace. The other two seating areas are in front of a large wall of paned windows. I also have two additional chairs with small accent



Courtesy photo

A "floating" couch allows for free movement in a living room.

tables, one in a large picture window, and the other by the built-in bookcases.

These less important seating areas have smaller chairs and tables.

Space planning is an integral part of designing and furnishing a home. If you don't have a good floor plan, even though you might think it looks attractive, it will never function right and therefore never look right either. Once you've addressed the function and traffic flow of the room and have the bones right, you can decorate it to suit your own distinctive style.

Shiree's Cheat Sheet

- When planning a kitchen, place the stove, refrigerator, and sink first, then build on the plan by neighboring task-related areas next to its corresponding workspace. For instance, my drinking glasses are next to my sink, my spices and olive oils are above my stove, and most of my baking ingredients are in my island.

- The work triangle should be 26 feet or less, with no single leg shorter than 4 feet or longer than 9 feet. No major traffic patterns should cross through the work triangle.

- Work aisles should be at least 43 inches wide or 48 inches wide with more than one cook.

- In furniture layouts, always keep a clear pathway between entrances and exits.

*Shiree Hanson Segerstrom studied and apprenticed in interior design for three years before launching her own firm in 1999. She is the author of the blog www.joyofnesting.blogspot.com and has been featured in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Wall Street Journal* online, *Sacramento Bee* and the stylish *California* living magazine, C. Contact her at www.shireesegerstrom.com or 532-2193.*