

Decor Score: Too much of a good thing

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: We bought our house because we thought we'd love the open floor plan - our living/dining room is more than two stories high at one point - but it's been hard to figure out how to arrange the furniture. All this headroom is getting to be too much. What can you suggest that will break it up and make it less cavern-like?

A: Aha! So it is possible to have too much of a good thing, at least, when it comes to wide, open and uninhibited spaces!

WIDE, OPEN - Built-ins let an open room meet different living needs without blocking the flow of space. CNS Photo courtesy of Brian Vanden Brink. I think John Portman has a lot to answer for: he's the architect who innovated the atrium hotel, where the rooms open onto a multistory high space in the center. Home builders jumped right on the idea, and here we are, some 30 years later, living in mini-atriums, often baffled by all that space.

It's truly a love/hate relationship. The enveloping light and overall lightness of these airy interiors is a fresh, special idea for the home front; the soaring space can be downright ennobling. Only kings and emperors once commanded such expansiveness! Yet kings and emperors had other people to furnish their castles.

Which brings us back to your question - and one answer that's contained in the photo we show here (borrowed from a book full of clever ideas: "Making Room" by Wendy A. Jordan, The Taunton Press)

Most of the first floor of this house is given over to a single, all-in-one room with very tall ceilings in the center. Still, the space is not overwhelming, thanks to a couple of clever ideas devised by the architectural team at Knight Associates.

They exposed beams to bring the "ceiling" down to cozier levels in the dining area. Notice that the beam

also holds the over-table light fixture. One side of the dining area is formed by the sideboard and low storage cabinets you can see beyond the table. The cabinets are actually the front side of a built-in seating group. On the backside, two couches meet in an angle to define the living "room" (which can be a guest room, too: each couch turns into a single bed.)

Even if you're not interested in built-ins, you could accomplish much the same effect by following the arrangement with free-standing furniture.

Q: I painted our master bedroom a nice warm gray, but I don't like the way the dark-stained woodwork looks with it. What do you recommend?

A: Paint the woodwork a slick, bright white. It will literally pop against those gray walls and bring new energy to the entire room.

Be warned, however, that your significant other may protest mightily. For reasons lost in the mists of time, men seem to love natural wood above all decorative things. He may take some convincing that paint is the best way to get your room out of the doldrums.

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