

Decor Score: Move it all aside and let the traffic go through

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: I can't figure out how to arrange the furniture in my living room. The problem is, the front door is directly opposite the door to the kitchen, and nearly everyone just races straight through the room, dodging around chairs and tables and making conversation hard. Should I just give up and shove everything out of the way to one side of the living room?

A: The best answer is yes. Family traffic is like a force of nature: you might as well get the sofa to a safe and quiet place off to one side and let the traffic flow as it will.

AN ARRANGED RELATIONSHIP - The right furniture arrangement lets foot traffic flow through smoothly without disturbing conversation in this living room. CNS Photo courtesy of Pergo. That's not necessarily a bad thing. As you can see in the room we show here, a minimal few furnishings can take away the illusion of a racetrack. A table or two and an eye-catching chair define the path and also keep it from looking bare. Here, a comfortable seating group has been gathered, well out of the busy path from one door to the next. A white area rug anchors the arrangement and clearly demarcates the two activity zones, thanks to the sharp contrast with the dark, gleaming floor.

That floor, by the way, is more than equal to daily foot traffic. For all its natural good looks, it's actually a laminate that promises to resist wear and be easy to maintain ("Brandied Black Cherry" is from Pergo's American Cottage Collection; see more at www.pergo.com).

Q: The step up into our dining area is visible. However, when you move from the dining area, the step becomes invisible. Numerous people have stumbled off the step. What can we do to make the edge of the step more noticeable and draw our guests' eyes to the (danger)? So far no one has hurt themselves and we want to keep it that way.

A: Thanks to the photo you sent, I can see your problem lots more easily than your guests, that's clear.

Were this a commercial situation, law would compel you to paint or otherwise mark the step's edge with a bright, warning color. But as OSHA yellow is nobody's first choice for a color accent in a living room, you have to find another way to draw attention to the lurking problem. Short of installing a hand railing, any obvious barricade should do the trick. You could mark the edge of the step with a large urn of dried flowers. Or position several long, low planters filled with low-light succulents along the upper edge. Most festive: when you have guests for dinner, outline the upper step with a line of votive candles.

You could also have your electrician edge the step with a strip of low-voltage lights. Their glow will add a glamorous touch that may be more expensive than our other suggestions, but lots cheaper than a lawsuit, should a fallen friend turn litigious.

Q: Where could I find a reclining sofa and loveseat that doesn't look like it belongs in a basement? I would love to have a set in my Great Room.

A: I must accuse you of failing to do your "home work." Recliners, including loveseats and sofas with sections that recline, have come a very long way, Baby, from the dumpy, frumpy, humongous upholstered piles of yesteryear. Manufacturers have refined the declining mechanisms. Top designers like Todd Oldham have injected a note of youthfulness. And new coverings, like chic patterns and leathers-to-die-for have made reclining furniture safe for the best rooms in the house.

Where to explore the new offerings? Without venturing into custom and high-end sources, we suggest that you look at what "middle-American" manufacturers like IKEA (www.ikea.com), Ethan Allen Global (www.ethanallen.com), and La-Z-Boy, yes, the grandfather of all reclining furniture (unless you count William Morris and his namesake chair). To see what's new from one of the oldest recliner resources, click on www.la-z-boy.com. The comfort company that was started in a garage (by two cousins in Monroe, Mich.) has since grown into a leading furniture retailer in the U.S. with plenty of styling that hardly belongs "in a basement."

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