

Decor Score: Decorating dilemma - 1 room, 2 focal points

by Rose Bennett Gilbert

Q: We are planning an addition to the house that will give us a new Great Room downstairs and a master bedroom-bath suite upstairs. My question is about the Great Room. We'd planned to put the fireplace on the outside wall but then we don't know where to put the entertainment center. If it goes on the opposite wall, how do we arrange the furniture to work in both directions?

A: Every room needs one focal point. In a large space, you can add a second, even a third, say, a dining area, pool table, or table-and-chairs grouping for playing games. The rub comes from trying to service two viewing areas with the same furniture.

NOW YOU SEE IT - This retractable projection TV fades into the woodwork when it's turned off. The fireplace turns to be the main attraction. CNS Photo courtesy of Brian Vanden Brink. One solution would be to locate your entertainment center on the wall that's at a right angle to the fireplace wall and arrange your seating area so you can sit to face your attraction of choice.

Another option is handsomely illustrated in the Great Room we show here: the screen for a projection TV has been mounted above the fireplace so it pulls down for viewing. Otherwise, the fireplace is the center of attention. Author Jane Gitlin ("Fireplaces," Taunton Press) also suggests building a niche, either above or beside the fireplace, where you can close off the TV when you prefer to enjoy the fire itself.

Notice the mirror-image seating arrangement here: an easy chair flanked by two sofas lets the occupants see both the TV and the crackling fire from wherever they choose to sit.

Q: We have a large entry hall but no separate dining room in our new house. I really hate entertaining in the kitchen (although it's big enough). Would it be weird to have a dinner party in the front hall?

A: Not weird, historic, actually. Many houses in earlier America were built without a dining room. In the summer months especially, families ate in their entry halls with the doors open to the breezes.

The dropleaf tables they used for dining spent the rest of the time pushed out of the way against the walls.

You could also borrow a convention from the Victorians and center a round table in your entry hall. Skirted to the floor and topped with a vase of flowers between meals, it would be double-duty space use of the smartest kind.

HATE COMING HOME TO A DARK HOUSE?

It's neither safe nor heart-warming, nor necessary, thanks to modern lighting technology.

Lutron Electronics, the bright minds behind the original dimmer switch, have come up with a relatively affordable wireless lighting control system that can be operated from your car or your bedside table. Based on radio frequency (RF), their new AuroRa system includes a controller you can clip to your car visor. Flip a switch and illuminate your way, not only into, but throughout the house. Say you wake up for a glass of milk at 2 a.m. The system, which includes five dimmers, can create a pathway of light down to the kitchen and back.

The RF technology has been around for some time, but costs a lot and required complicated installation and programming. AuroRay retails for about \$750 and is aimed at do-it-yourselfers. Have a closer look at www.lutron.com.