

Decor Score: Managing space and 'floating' furniture

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: Our "new" (1929) house has a huge living room, 30 by 20 feet. It overwhelms our furniture. We even had our living and dining room carpets from the old house sewn together and they just make an area rug in this room. My husband says he doesn't mind the empty space ... a good thing because we can't afford new furniture for a while. Our question is, what's the best way to arrange our sofa and chairs in all this space?

FINDING THAT FOCAL POINT - Gentle colors, subtle textures, and warm wood-tones are enough to furnish a large sitting room. CNS Photo courtesy of Eric Schmidt.

A: Snugly. Organize your seating pieces close enough together to form an intimate, cohesive conversation grouping - no shouting from sofa to distant chairs. It's OK to "float" your seating arrangement in the floor space; find a focal point - like a fireplace or picture window - and organize the furniture there around your area rug. Include a table within easy reach of each seat, and low, task lighting - table and floor lamps, not oppressive overheads - that creates a warm glow and sets the seating area off from the rest of the room.

A space as large as yours can use a secondary activity center, a desk or a table and chairs for games, say. A piano would be perfect, as designer Eric Schmidt (www.ericsschmidtinteriors.com) proves in the large and gracious living room we show here. The white lacquered baby grand, imposing on its own area rug (a totally white French cow hide), provides visual balance to the central grouping, and also carries forward Schmidt's palette of gentle, calming colors, toast, white, and cream, with touches of celadon green.

His objective, Schmidt says, was to create a "modernized traditional" look in this elegant old manor house. The original owners had made their fortune in concrete and built the four-story Georgian-style house of the material they revered - except, luckily, for those handsome hardwood floors. Laid "racetrack" style and buffed to a beautiful gleam, the floors fill the space without actually filling it.

Ditto for the many different textures Schmidt has integrated in this seemingly spare space. The chaise is covered in chenille; the walls are touch-me smooth Venetian plaster, and there are surprises like the solid rock crystal pulls on the polished nickel bar in the far corner (he designed it for Sheryl Wagner, the renowned bath fixture manufacturer).

A tip worth borrowing from the design pro: with such serendipities in store for the wandering eye, no one will ever look at this room and see just "empty" space.

WHAT'S COOKING IN TODAY'S KITCHEN?

The old pun has plenty of bright new answers, according to a recent overview of kitchen fashions sponsored by IFDA (International Furnishings & Design Association; www.ifda.com) in New York. Expert seers included John Troxell Jr., design director of Wood-Mode, and Jo-Anne Pier, an editor at Metropolitan Home magazine. Among their observations:

White is still the most popular kitchen color in the U.S., but look what's already happening abroad: purple, hot pink, greens, yellows, and - are you ready for purple? - these bold colors are showing up in contemporary European kitchens.

There is also what Troxell calls, a "new white:" a beige-y mushroom color.

Black-and-white is getting hot, and, with contemporary styling "coming on strong" (Troxell), black and gray cabinets are out there, too.

Love that island! Homeowners who have work islands are twice as happy with their kitchens (Pier).

Refrigerators are looking more and more like real furniture. Troxell showed a number with a bonnet top and cabriole legs. But some things just don't change:

Half of all the kitchens in America today still have a junk drawer, Pier reports.

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