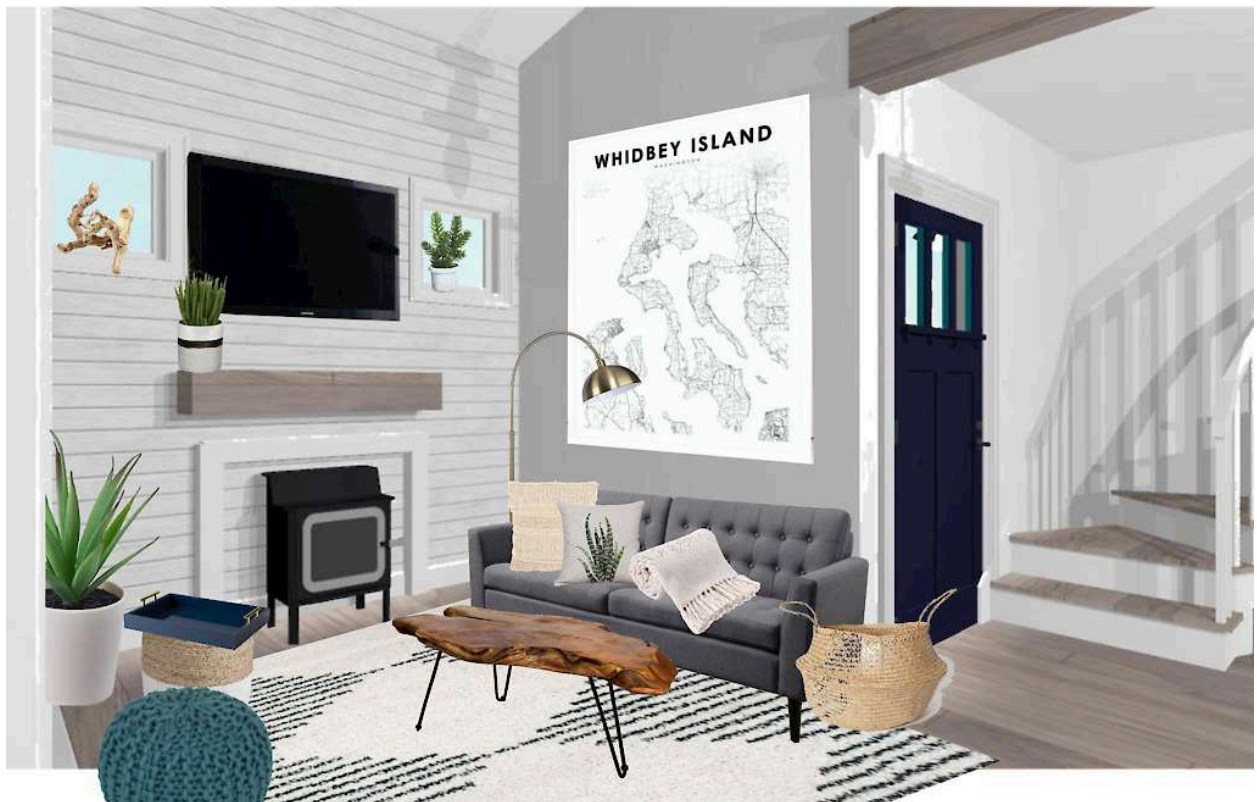




Jessica Welling Interiors

Beautiful Design for Everyday

Living Room Design 101





Let's Get Started!

Your living room is such an important gathering place in your home, and I know you want to get it just right. So much so that you might even be paralyzed by indecision? I'm here to help! I'm going to guide you through the step-by-step process I use to design a living room, and spill my secrets! Before you hit the furniture stores, we've got some homework to do.

Photo by [regardsetmaisons](https://www.regardsetmaisons.com/)

Step 1: Fill Out the Room Design Worksheet

Go ahead and print out the worksheet before you begin. You can scroll to the bottom of this guide (p.26 & 27). I know it might be tempting to jump ahead to the more exciting parts (like shopping). But stick with me through the legwork at the beginning. It'll be worth it, I promise!



Step 2: Go Hunting for Inspiration

If you've already got some images of living rooms you love and want to emulate, great! Get them out. If not, Pinterest is your new best friend. I keep a Pinterest board called "Living Rooms Gallery" for this purpose and I'm always adding to it. You can check it out here:

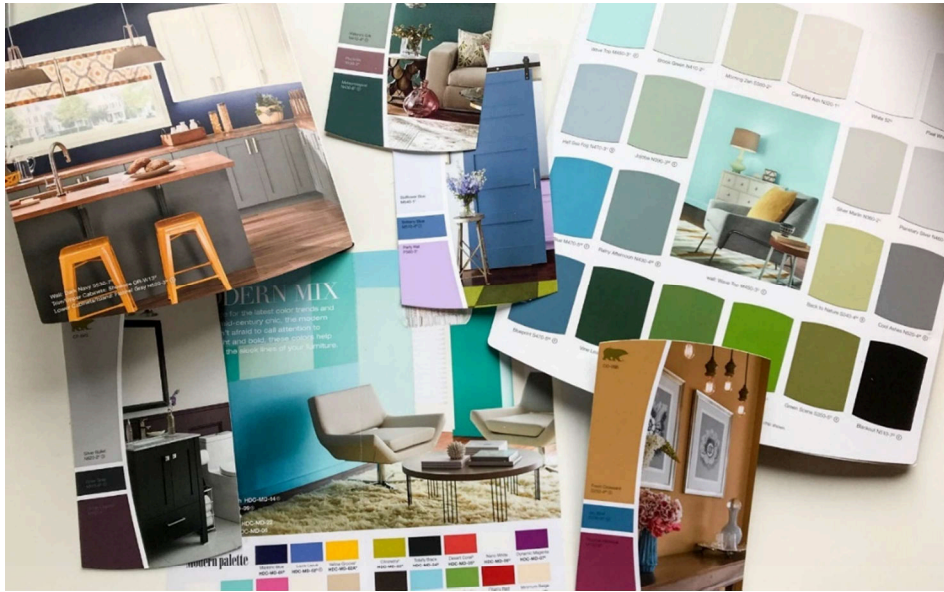
<https://www.pinterest.com/jessicawellinginteriors/living-rooms-gallery/>

Photo: [Place of My Taste](#)

Step 3: Choose Your Colors

You can wait to do this one until later if you prefer...but you'll want to have it nailed down before you buy ANYTHING! My best advice here is to look at those Pinterest photos of rooms you love and find one that uses great colors. Another approach is to find a painting, rug, or fabric that you love and pull some of the colors from that. If you are keeping some furniture, the colors of those pieces are part of your color scheme. So is the flooring and trim in the room. If you can get upholstery fabric samples, paint swatches, flooring samples, curtain fabric, etc., do it!

Another strategy is to go and look at the color scheme pamphlets at the paint store. They usually have photos of rooms decorated in great color combos. I grabbed these at Home Depot.

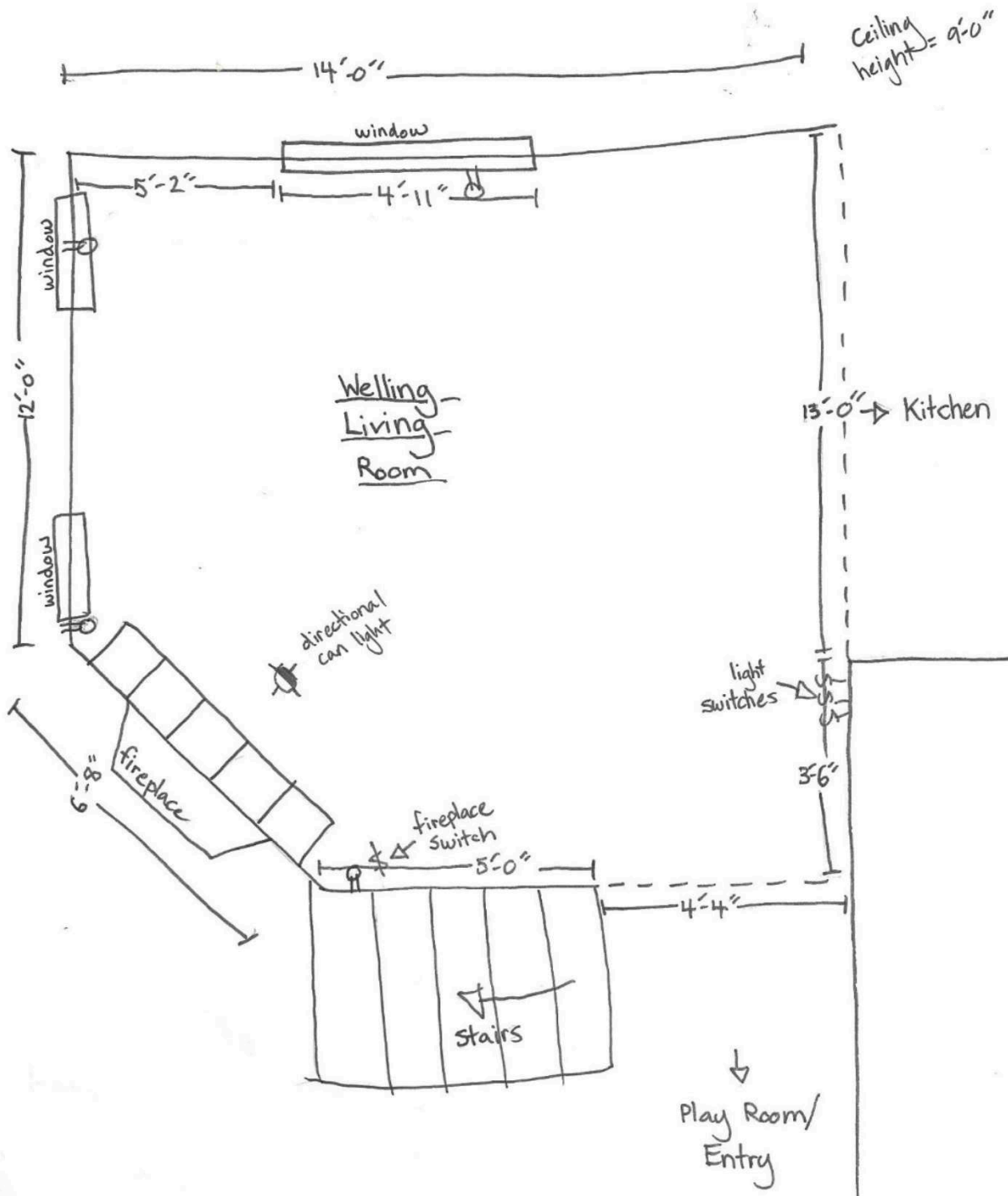


Let's save the final decision on wall color/s for last. You can paint your walls any color imaginable, but it's a little trickier to find just the right color of sofa, accent chair, etc. I promise some future blog posts on this topic, and we'll cover it in Step 11.

Step 4: Measure & Draw a Rough Floorplan

In design school they taught us to make a rough sketch of a room and write the measurements along the walls. It's also helpful to include light switches, outlets, overhead lights, and any HVAC vents, radiators, etc. on your floorplan. Be sure to include your windows and doors! Also measure the ceiling height and write it down off to the side. I do this often enough that I bought a laser measure, but any measuring tape will work. Enlist a friend to help if you have a large space to measure. While you're at it, go ahead and measure any doorways the furniture will need to come through to get to your living room. You can thank me later.

Here's a rough sketch of my living room. You'll probably want to use pencil- I'm just using pen so it will show up better for you. It's not beautiful or even to scale. It's exactly what the name implies- rough!





Again, please please don't skip this step! I've seen people buy the wrong size of sofa for their space so many times! Or something that won't fit through the door. And then what are ya gonna do???

Don't let this happen to you. MEASURE!

Step 5: Make your Floorplan to Scale

Once you've got that rough sketch in your hot little hands, it's time to draw it to scale. Don't panic- the internet is full of free design tools to help. Check out this one from Haverty's:

<https://www.havertys.com/furniture/room-planner>

You can put your dimensions in, adjust the shape of the room, add windows and doors, fireplaces, etc. And then later you can add furniture. The reason we're doing this is so we can add scale furniture later.

Here's my living room again, drawn to scale:



Step 6: Add Furniture to Your Plan

Here comes the fun part! It's time to add furniture to your plan.

<https://www.havertys.com/furniture/room-planner>

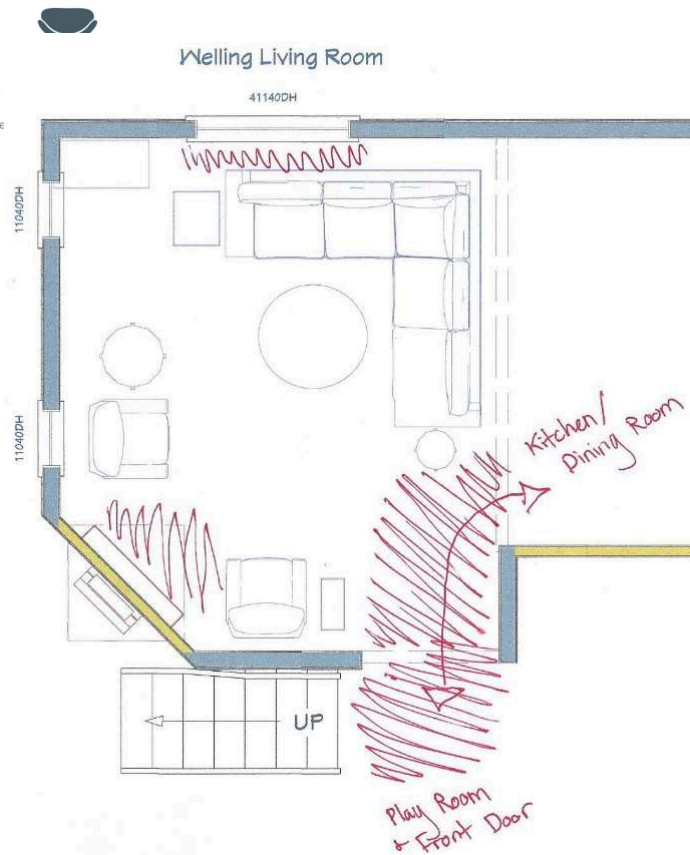
There are so many reasons to lay out the room before you go shopping! Aside from the obvious- making sure that sofa will fit, it can help you visualize the room in a way you might not have before. When I started doing actual floorplans and playing with furniture layouts it was a total gamechanger. Once you've lived somewhere a while, it can be hard to imagine things laid out differently than they are.

Measure the footprint of any pieces of furniture you're going to keep in the room. Then create pieces to represent them in the room-planning tool. So... if your sofa is 72" x 36" you should grab a sofa icon, and change the dimensions to 72"x36". Do the same with any end tables, bookshelves, grand pianos, etc.

Jessica

Now you can add more pieces to go with what you've already got. I like to start with the big things first, and in a living room that's usually a sofa. At this point you don't need to have an actual sofa picked out- we're just figuring out how big it should be.

There's a lot to think about here, but don't be overwhelmed. Here's a list of things to consider as you create a furniture plan:



- a. **Traffic Patterns.** It's really important to make sure that people can freely move around the room. I know this can get tricky with small spaces, but try to follow these rules as closely as you can: Allow at least 3' in front of any doors (including openings), make sure there's at least 3-4' for any major pathways through a room, and allow at least 18" between coffee table and sofa. If you have windows you need to access, account for this too. If it's helpful to you, print out your scale floorplan and shade in these areas.
My living room is sort of the hub of our house, so there's an important pathway from the front door and stairs to the kitchen that goes right through it. I've shaded this in the floorplan above. I'm going to be sure not to place any furniture there.
- b. **No Furniture Against Walls!** I know this may feel counter-intuitive, but pulling the sofa and other furniture out away from the walls can actually make your space feel bigger. A living room should have a seating group- a few pieces that face each other, so that ideally, you can have a conversation with someone sitting nearby. Of course there are always exceptions, but the majority of your furniture, especially your sofa, should not be against the walls.

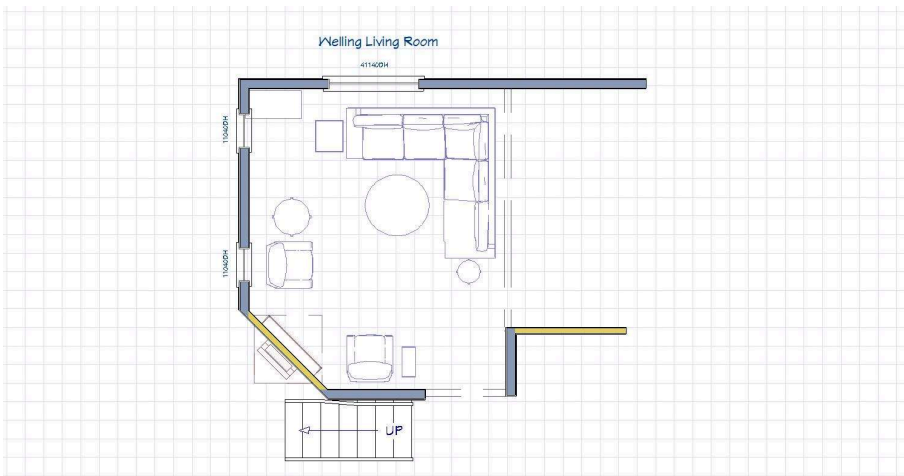


Find Your Focal Point. Many living rooms have a natural focal point. Most often it's a fireplace, like this awesome one by Jaclyn Johnson on [Glitter Guide](#) (above). I'm totally making over my fireplace to look like this someday! But it could also be large windows-especially if there's a nice view. You can also create your own focal point. It might be a TV or electric fireplace (please get a nice one and not something cheesy-looking!) The furniture should orient toward this focal point, whatever it is. And if you're planning to watch TV in the living room, the main sofas should be placed so you can comfortably see the TV.

Here's a client's living room, with the TV as the focal point.



Here's my living room again. I have a corner fireplace as my focal point, so I want the furniture to orient toward it. Here is one layout that achieves this goal:



- c. **Accent Pieces.** Every seat in the room should have a table within easy reach to set down a drink. This could be a coffee table, end table, or sofa table. Be sure that the shape and size work with the other furniture in your plan.

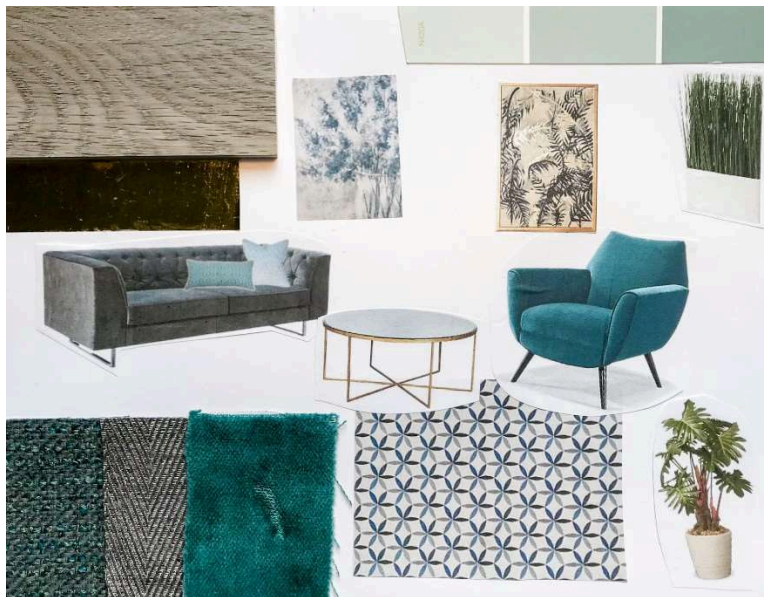
Step 7: Make a Design Board



These days most of my shopping is done online. You'll ideally want to go to a showroom and actually sit on that sofa before buying it, but you will likely order a lot of the smaller pieces online. A design board will give you a good picture of how the pieces you're interested in will look together, and the great thing is you can find photos of them online to use on your board. My favorite free online design board site just closed up shop, so I will find you a new resource ASAP!



In the meantime, you can always put together a physical design board.



Include fabric, paint, blind swatches, flooring samples, etc. whenever you can. And you don't even have to arrange the items to look like a room. Just schlep 'em on there if you like!

Step 8: Go Shopping!

I know this is the one you've been waiting for! By now you should have a really good idea of the look you want for your living room. Hopefully you have colors chosen and a good idea of the style and size of furniture pieces you need. Take that furniture plan with you! Did you hear that? **TAKE THE FURNITURE PLAN WITH YOU!** Grab your design board too while you're at it. That way, when you see an awesome perfect sofa you love, you can look at the dimensions of the sofa that will fit in your space and make a good decision.

Sofa. I want you to shop for the sofa or sectional first. It will likely be the biggest thing in the room, and everything else will hinge on it. I recommend a neutral color for most people, and these days that usually means some shade of grey. This is probably the biggest investment piece, and you want it to look good for years to come- and with styles to come! Don't buy a white couch. I've been there and done that. Just trust me on this one- not a good idea.

I like to bring color into the room with wall art, curtains, throws and pillows, accent chairs, rugs, and accessories. Most of these are smaller investments and will have a shorter life, so I can change them up in a few years as styles evolve.





“Oh look you can buy a matching sofa, loveseat, and chair at the furniture store.”

NO! NO! NO! Resist the urge, my friend. Look back at those beautiful living rooms you loved on Pinterest. Do they have a matching set of furniture? No they don't. The designers mixed and matched pieces to create their own unique look, and that's what I want you to do too. (Exceptions: you could get 2 identical sofas or 2 matching chairs, or possibly a matching sofa and loveseat, but never more than 2 pieces!)

If you're breaking out in a sweat just thinking about actually committing to a sofa because you're worried it won't be right for your space, here's what I want you to do: go get some old newspaper or cardboard and create a cutout of the footprint of the sofa you're considering. Put it in the room. See how it feels. Once you've lived with it for a day or two, you can shop with confidence!

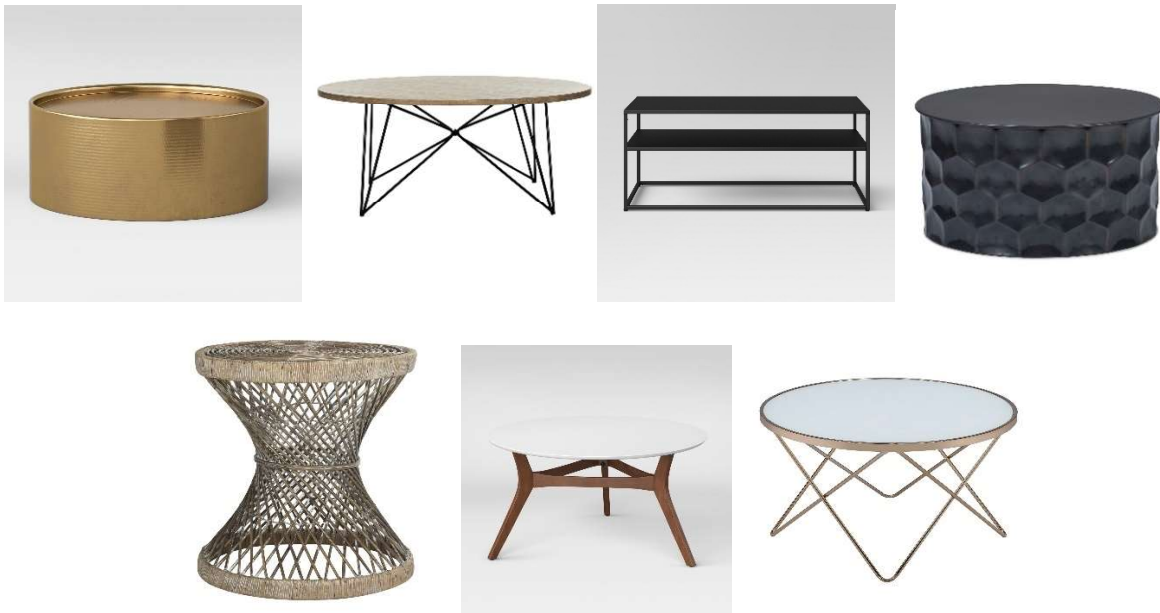
One more note about sofas and then we can move on: Buy something nice that will hold up over time. If my budget is tight, I personally prefer to buy something used that's in really good condition (and style) from Craigslist or OfferUp than to go buy a \$400 (cheap) one new. Good foam, upholstery work, and frames cost money, and this is the difference between your sofa looking squashed down and wilted in three years and looking like new. Invest because this is the piece of furniture people will actually sit on.

Accent Chairs. For things like accent chairs, it's a slightly different story. I'm fine with spending \$150 on a stylish accent chair from Target or Wayfair. I know the quality will not be fabulous and it will not last for 20 years, and I'm okay with that. It might not even be super comfortable. I'm ok with that too, as long as it's reasonably sturdy and not horrible to sit on. Why? Because it's an accent. It's a style statement that someone will sit on occasionally when we have guests. And it will work just fine for that. I found all of these fun accent chairs on Target.com for around \$150 or less.



Try to bring a variety of colors/shades and textures into the room with fabrics (all within your color scheme of course). Since I already have a charcoal colored sectional in my living room, I'm going to choose a different color for the accent chair upholstery.

Coffee and end tables are a great opportunity to bring interesting shapes, materials and textures into your space. Don't miss this opportunity! Choose something cool. Look how many cool coffee tables my quick search on Target.com turned up!



And finally, don't buy everything at one place. Putting a room together takes time, and that's okay. Enjoy the process!

Step 9: Choose a Rug/Flooring

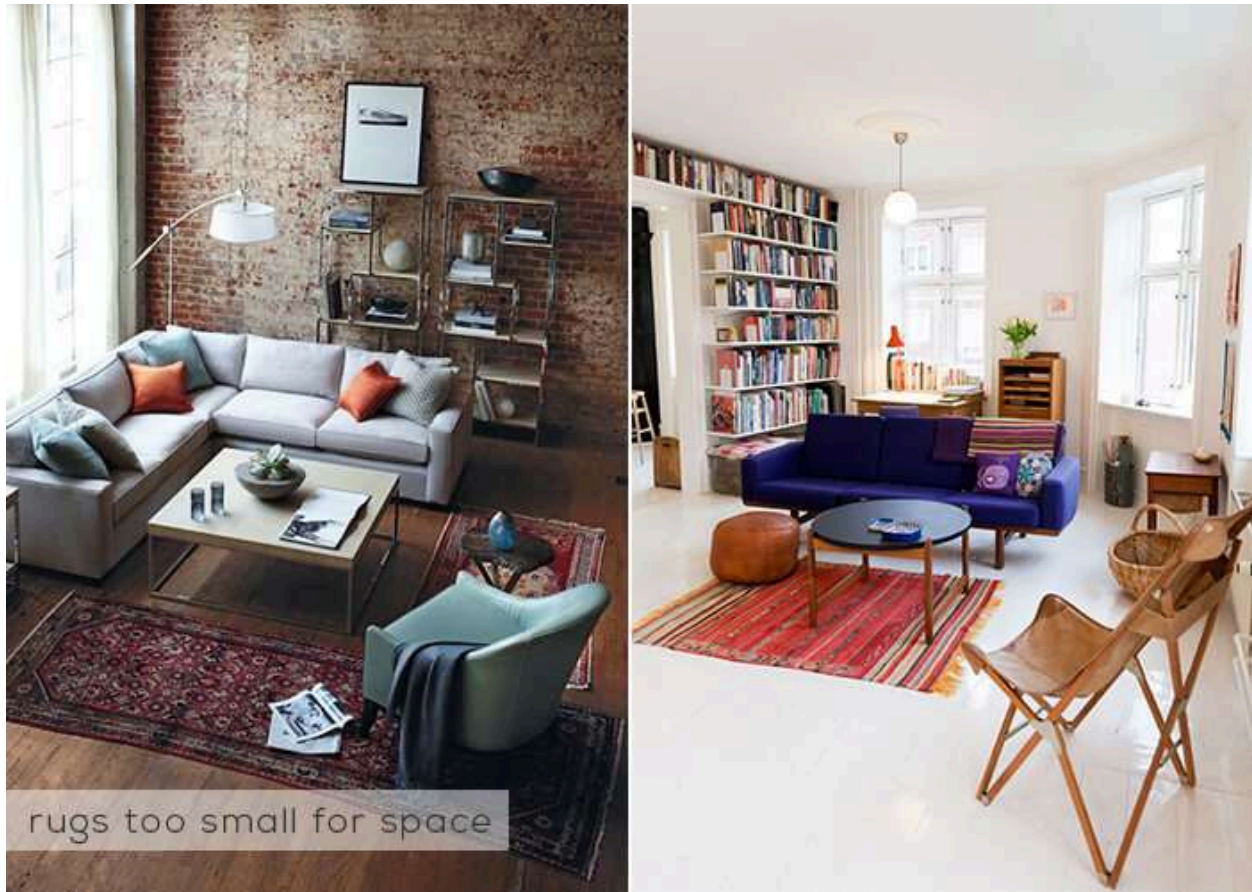
Not every room needs a rug (if you have carpet, for example) but if you have hard floors, a rug can add coziness and anchor your seating group. It pulls the room together. Be sure the front legs of your sofa or sectional and chairs sit on the rug wherever possible. See how the rug in this living room from [Decoholic](#) (below) defines the space?



The most common mistake I see people make with rugs is buying one that's too small. I get it- rugs are expensive, and exponentially more so the bigger they get. Most standard-sized living rooms need at least an 8'x10 rug. I've also found that the more furniture is actually sitting on the rug, the less likely

the rug will move around and rumple up- especially when crazy dog goes flying toward the front door to greet visitors!

Here are a couple of less successful rugs in otherwise lovely rooms:



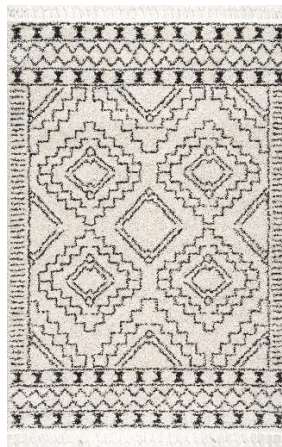
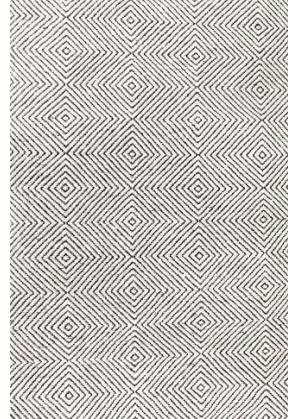
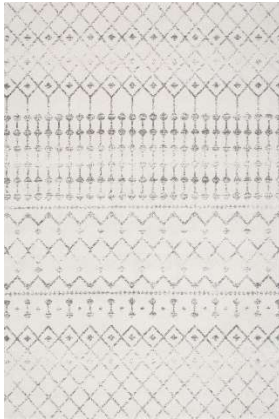
Images: [Emily Henderson](#)

I personally want to be able to change things up every several years, so I tend to order inexpensive rugs online. Also we wear our shoes in the house and my family is just hard on flooring. If you want to invest in a fancy wool rug, awesome!

A rug is a fun place to add color and pattern to your room. Just be sure that color and pattern works (and doesn't compete) with everything else you have going on. I find cool and inexpensive rugs at [RugsUSA.com](#), Target,

Overstock, Wayfair, Amazon, and World Market. I often see cool ones at HomeGoods too.

Here are a few awesome reasonably-priced (mostly under \$200 when on sale) 8x10 area rugs from RugUSA (they do 50% off sales regularly)



RugsUSA.com

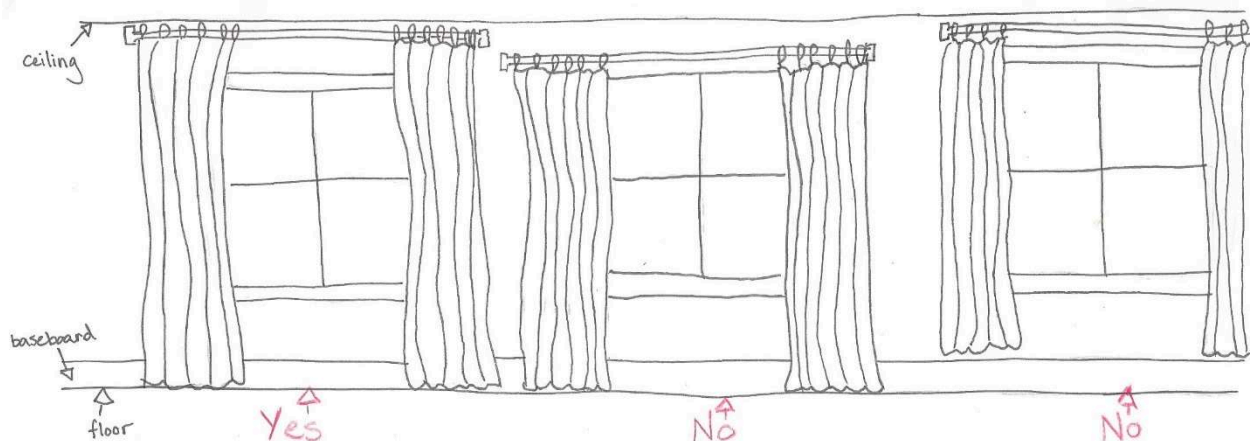
WorldMarket.com

Overstock.com

Step 10: Choose Window Treatments

I'm a fan of letting as much natural light into my house as possible- and that means opening my blinds every single day. Actually we just keep most of them open all the time. And when I say "open" I mean pulled all the way up. But there are some windows (like bedrooms and those on the front of the house) that we need to open and close regularly. We currently have old ugly miniblinds, but when we replace them we will keep in mind that we need something that is designed to be opened and closed regularly. So for me the best choices would probably be cellular blinds or roman shades.

I favor long panel curtains. If your ceilings feel low, hang your curtain rods as close to the ceiling as possible. If you have taller ceilings, hang the rods half way between the top of the window and the ceiling. If you have super-tall ceilings (over 9') hang the rods 12-15" above your window frames. You never want to hang them right above the window frame (below center). Make sure your curtains reach the floor. If there's some reason they can't reach the floor (like baseboard heaters), go without. Curtains that don't skim the floor (or get within an inch of it) = no bueno.



Here are my favorite sources for reasonably-priced curtains: Target, Ikea, and HomeGoods. If you sew, they're really easy to make yourself (though not usually cheaper). I promise to do a blog post on window treatments in the near future and get into more detail.

Let's look at my living room again. I have one window that needs window treatments. The two small ones are clerestory windows, so they're above the line of sight and don't really need anything. I would ideally like to put cellular blinds on the bigger window, and I will need 2 long curtain panels, since I have 9' ceilings. (And as a side note, I'm putting identical curtain panels on the sliding glass door in the adjoining room). All windows in a space get the same treatments, if any.



Step 11: Choose Paint Color/s

Now that you've got your room almost all put together (or at least planned) it will be a snap to choose a paint color that compliments your choices. I know there are a lot of options and that can feel really overwhelming. Before you head to the paint store, let's get that design board back out. I think it's a good idea to have a plan in mind before you go to the paint store.

Repeat after me: "I don't have to find the perfect paint color, I just need a great color."

I tend to be a perfectionist myself, but the reality here is, there are probably several different colors (maybe not very different from one another) that will look fabulous with the beautiful furnishings you've already chosen. So don't freak out on me. You're going to do fine!





Before you head to the paint store, you're going to decide what color family you want- as in a light green-blue or a bright yellow. Once you get there, you'll know right where to go and you won't need to spend 40 minutes hemming and hawing in front of the swatch stand. Grab some swatches. Choose one you like, and a shade lighter. Choose some with different undertones. If you're feeling brave you can go ahead and order samples of your 3 favorites. If you're not feeling brave, then take those swatches home and do your hemming and hawing there. Then go back, order samples of your favorites (never more than 5).

I like to paint swatches of each sample side by side on each wall of the room. Be sure to paint one set right next to your trim color. Label them- you're going to paint over all of this anyway. Now live with this for a few days. How do you like the colors in the morning light? Late at night in artificial light? Afternoon? Hopefully you can start narrowing it down. Call a friend over to help if necessary. Now go order your paint and get to work! Once you've chosen a great color, no waffling. Go with it!

When in serious doubt, choose a warm light grey. And I mean pretty light. If you have beautiful architecture and moldings around your windows and doors, you can choose a slightly warm white.

Here's my go-to gray from Behr: [Seagull Grey](#)

Step 12: Light it Up!

Most living rooms do not have built-in overhead lighting, so chances are you're going to need to add some lights. Actually you need to add some lights even if you have overhead lighting. I'm personally fond of floor lamps because they seem to live longer in my household of busy children and large dog. We've had at least four table lamps bite it in the past two years. But ideally you would want some floor and some table lamps. Do what will work

in your house. If you're trying to create symmetry, you might get a pair of matching table lamps, but otherwise steer clear of lamp "sets." If you buy a set you give up the opportunity to add flare and interest to your space. And back to those Pinterest photos...

Be sure your comfy reading spots are well-lit.

If you can make it happen, a chandelier often looks gorgeous in a living room. I know this requires wiring and all, so it may not be an option. Hang it over the coffee table or high enough that no one will hit their head.



Once you've got some lights, stand back and look. Are there any dark corners? Do you have light shining both upward and downward? Do you have different heights and intensities of light?

I will also write you all a blog post about this one in the near future!

Finally, let's talk about lightbulbs. We want WARM WHITE. This can actually be a bit intimidating. I just went to Home Depot this weekend to grab lightbulbs and HOLY COW they have a whole giant aisle of lightbulbs!

I know the term "Daylight" sounds good when you see it on a lightbulb package, but it is not good, it's cold and blue. It will make your house feel like a poorly lit office building. Every lightbulb company has it's own naming conventions for the different colors of lights, but they often put a diagram on the back of the box that will show you where the bulbs fall in the cool-warm light spectrum. Choose bulbs on the warmer side.



Step 13: Accessorize

The furniture was the sort of fun part, and accessories are the really fun part! Most accessories are returnable, so the stakes are not that high. With your plan and design board in hand, go do some shopping. For this step, I usually buy some different options because you really need to see those throw pillows together on the couch in real life to know whether they will work. Make sure they are returnable!!! I have this recurring nightmare that Target, HomeGoods, Ikea, and Costco all blacklist me and my picture is hanging behind their customer service counter because I return too many things. But it hasn't come true yet so shop and return away my friends!

Throw Pillows & Blankets. Stuck on throw pillows? Think of them as a low-stakes opportunity to add color, texture, and pattern to your room. If your sofa upholstery is a linen-look weave, choose different textures for your throw pillows- cable knit (for Fall and Winter), satin, flokati, embroidered, cowhide, etc. Throw blankets are another chance to do the same.



Check out jessicawellinginteriors.com for more throw pillow ideas!

Indoor Plants. I'm so excited that indoor plants are a thing again! When I was little I wanted a whole jungle room. If you're not up for caring for indoor plants or don't have the sunlight for them, choose fake ones. No shame there! I tend to mix faux and real plants. Put a tall plant in a bare corner! Hang them from the ceiling if you like! I'm especially loving these faux plants at IKEA- they have great reasonably-priced fake plants and pots.



The one on the left is a real prayer plant, and I'm in love with those cool leaves! The one on the right that hangs down is my current fav IKEA fake plant. It says FEJKA on the bottom- but I think that's a whole line of plants. I don't see this one on their website but it's there sometimes when I visit the store.



I have a guide to styling indoor plants if you need some tips.

<https://jessicawellinginteriors.com/style-indoor-plants/>

Art. The wall art in your living room should fit in with your color scheme. As I mentioned before, you might even use a painting or other art to create a color scheme. That's what I did with my own living room. I found this flower painting that I loved, and I pulled some of the colors from it to create a color pallet for the whole room.



It's also important to consider the scale of your artwork. This is a nice big painting, and it fills a good portion of the space on the wall. If you choose small pieces, you may need to group a few together. I find inexpensive wall art at Joann fabrics, HomeGoods, T.J.Maxx, and Ikea is great for frames. Someday I'm hoping to start buying real original art. Check out [minted.com](https://www.minted.com) for affordable original art direct from the artist. You can check out my Wall Art Inspiration Pinterest board here:

<https://www.pinterest.com/jessicawellinginteriors/wall-art/>

Step 14: Stand Back & Admire!

Way to go you! Now you can enjoy your beautiful space! Invite some friends over to celebrate. And don't forget to send me a picture!



Shoot me an email if something in your living room has you stumped and I'll do my best to answer your question!

Jess@jessicawellinginteriors.com

P.S. Still feeling overwhelmed? You can always hire me to do some consulting or design it for you 😊 I can give you as little or as much help as you need!

jess@jessicawellinginteriors.com

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Living Room Design 101

Room Design Worksheet

What do you love about this room? (Great natural light, open floorplan, etc.)

What do you dislike about this room? (feels dark, low ceiling, too cluttered, etc.)

What pieces of furniture, if any, do you want to keep?

How many people will use the space?



Does this room serve any other purpose beside living room? (entryway, home office)

What do you want to do in your living room? (entertain, read, watch TV, etc.)

What needs to be stored in this room?

What is your approximate budget for this project?