

Creating a Focal Point in a Room

by Lynne Black Wall

The phrase, “You’ve got to start somewhere,” can refer to a lot of different things, but when you are talking about good room design, it can only mean one thing- Focal Point.

“Just what is a focal point and how do I get one?” may be running through your mind. A focal point is the main point of interest in a room: the place where your eye is drawn to first. The flow of a room starts at the focal point and travels around the room taking in the scale, balance, textures, patterns, and proportions of all the other objects in the room. The flow is affected not only by what you put in the room but by where you place it at within the room. Focal points anchor rooms and their contents.

Some rooms have architectural focal points such as fireplaces, others have natural focal points such as a wonderful view, and some rooms have nothing but plain white walls void of architectural interest and views. It is in these spaces that contrived focal points are created. A contrived focal point is just that, contrived, made up, and brought into being by the imagination.

If you have a room with no existing focal point, it is easy to create one. You don’t have to have a large budget and undergo a major remodel either. Many simple and budget friendly things can be done to create a focal point.

One of the easiest is to paint a wall in a contrast color to the others, then arrange a collection of photographs, pictures, decorative plates, or even clocks on it, in an interesting fashion. By framing photographs in the same way, or grouping pictures with similar frames, you help to create flow in the room. It is quick, easy, and if you have an existing collection, costs only the price of a can of paint. If you don’t yet have a collection of items, you can still start and then add to it. If you just aren’t into collecting, placing a single large, very large, piece of artwork on the wall will work as well. You can also place a bookcase, console, or desk in front of the wall and hang a picture over it as another option. Even a smaller scale entertainment center against a painted wall with a few candlesticks, and a green plant on top can be utilized as a focal point.

If your budget allows, a large piece of furniture, such as an armoire, can be used to anchor your seating, plus provide storage for your television and accompanying electronics. By using a unique piece, perhaps with carved or hand painted accents, you can create your focal point, provide additional storage, and add pattern or texture to the room as well. That’s what good design is all about, function and “fashion”.

Many furniture retailers carry electric fireplaces, which not only provide an architectural focal point, but also serve to provide additional warmth and ambience to the room. Newer models have flickering flames that are hard to distinguish from an actual fire flame and have remote controls. You just set it in place, plug it in, and sit back to enjoy your new focal point. Hanging a picture or mirror above it, as well as, adding a few accessory pieces to the mantel, finishes it off nicely.

Because focal points have visual weight, other items in your room need to be placed so that they balance that weight. Each room should have only one focal point, but it can have other areas of interest or emphasis. If you have an architectural point of interest on one wall, such as a fireplace, and have a contrived point of interest on an opposite wall, such as a large entertainment center or projection television, it is best to create two separate seating areas, each with their own “focal point”.

Another thing to consider in good room design is the facing wall. This may or may not be the wall on which the focal point is located. The facing wall is the wall opposite the entry into the room. Because it is seen first, it makes a good location for a contrived focal point, but in rooms with architectural or natural focal points, it should be treated as a point of emphasis. It is important that this wall create interest and excitement, after all, first impressions of your room shouldn't be boring.

In summary, remember, focal points are what the eye is drawn to first, and around which seating is arranged. It can be architectural, natural, or contrived and created by you.