

Occasional furniture buying guide

The right occasional furniture can make or break a room's design. Like a great pair of shoes that completes an outfit, finding just the right combination of style and function is a challenge. Occasional furniture is not optional furniture; occasional furniture is an important functional component of a room that should be chosen with care and consideration of many different factors.

Scale

Scale is always important when selecting furniture. Not only should you measure the room before you start looking for occasional furniture, but you should note the dimensions of the primary furnishings in the room. (Use our online [room planner](#) to get an idea of the scale of the room and the pieces in it before you set out.) Here are a couple rules of thumb to consider when selecting occasional furniture:

- An end table should not be taller than the arm of the sofa or chair that it sits beside. The table top should be within eight inches of the top of the arm for the easy reach of items on the table.
- There should be a minimum of 18 inches of space between a sofa and a cocktail table. Items on the table will be within reach, while allowing easy access to seating.

Construction

The standards of construction apply to the selection of occasional furniture as well. These include dovetail joints, corner blocks, levelers, dust panels, back panels, and sturdy drawer glides. (Please see our [Wood furniture buying guide](#) and our [Dining room furniture buying guide](#) for more buying ideas.)

Planning Yourr

Think of how you use the room before you go shopping. You will not find a single piece of furniture that solves every problem on your list; however, if you inventory your greatest needs, you should be able to make your room more functional and livable. Don't forget to take along a copy of your floor plan when you go shopping.

Entertaining – Do you occasionally need extra seating? You might look for a multifunction ottoman that can be used as; a cocktail table when a tray is place on top, extra seating for party guests or a traditional ottoman to put your feet up on while relaxing. Another option is a cocktail table that comes with ottomans that tuck underneath it or nest when they are not needed.

Occasional furniture refers to smaller furniture items, such as end tables, cocktail tables, curios and accent furniture.

OCCASIONAL FURNITURE SHOPPING CHECKLIST

Room Dimensions

___ Feet ___ Inches by

___ Feet ___ Inches

Anchor Piece Dimensions

- Sofa _____
- Loveseat _____
- Chair _____
- Other _____

Room Activities

- Entertaining
- Watching TV
- Play
- Reclining
- Reading
- Eating
- Laptop
- Shownlace

Watching TV – If you watch TV in the room there are some miscellaneous items that doubtlessly accompany it: DVDs or videos, remotes, video games and TV guides. You might want to look for occasional pieces with drawers or cabinets to stow away these viewing accouterments to keep your room from looking cluttered.

Child's Play – Do your kids play in the room? You may want to consider occasional furniture that incorporates storage for the quick cleanup of toys and games. If your children are very small, you may want to avoid tables with sharp corners that could injure a learning-to-walk toddler.

Reclining – Reclining or motion furniture often puts restrictions and requirements on your occasional furniture. Cocktail tables on casters are a great solution for changing the distance between the sofa and table as the foot rest is extended or retracted.

Reading – For those who like to curl up with a good book, good lighting is essential. When shopping for an end table to sit beside a reading chair, keep in mind that the lower edge of the lampshade sitting on the table should not be higher than the eye level of a person sitting in the chair. You want the light cast onto the page, not into the eye of the reader.

Eating – For many people the living room serves as an occasional dining room. Your choice of occasional furniture can minimize the inevitable spills. Some cocktail tables are designed with tops that can be adjusted to dining table level, making it easier to eat. Nesting tables are a great option for an extra place to put your plate. Some manufacturers make end tables that double as storage for tray tables.

Working on Your Laptop – With the growth of wireless computer networks, now any room in the home can serve as the home office. Some manufacturers accommodate the migration of the laptop into the living room with occasional furniture built for office functions. Adjustable height cocktail tables take the laptop off your lap to make typing more efficient. End tables can double as easily-accessed printer storage.

Showplace – Collectibles are a great way to add character to a room. Many collectibles are investments worthy of protection. A curio cabinet can highlight your treasures and protect them at the same time. Most modern curios have mirrored backs, glass shelves and interior lights to show off the contents. Look for a curio that is easy to get into with easy access to the light switch. The size of the curio should fit the scale of the room as well as the breadth of your collection. Consider setting all of the collection out on a table and inspecting them before you go shopping to get a sense of how much space you will need. Don't feel obliged to stuff everything into one cabinet; consider rotating your collection, highlighting a few pieces at time. After all, that's what most major museums do!