

RIGHT: With the sofa and chairs placed close together and to the coffee table between them, the sitting area in one corner of this room feels intimate. Because none of the seating is against the wall, the arrangement looks open and accessible too. Sitters can look out the windows or observe activities elsewhere in the room. (David Jimenez)

OPPOSITE: A fireplace on the end wall provides background in this sitting area, where a long curvilinear sofa, two club chairs, and a small armchair circle round a center coffee table. This grouping is welcoming; the low backs keep the room open to guests and the surrounding windows. (Sally Markham)



What's the best way to compose a "seating group?"

There's a natural and normal way in which conversation ensues. If you want to have a room that encourages interaction with people, proximity becomes important. It's very difficult to have conversation leap over a circulation path, whether people are passing through or not. It's a psychological barrier. So chairs need to be near to each other. If your knees are an inch away from each other it's very intimate. If you're sitting at a right angle to somebody, it's a little more comfortable and still feels personal. And the further away you get, the less personal it becomes. Which is why in the increasingly big houses these days the rooms are actually problematic—they are too big for intimate interaction.

What are the risks and rewards of making a piece of furniture a focal point?

For me, art is probably a more appropriate focal point for a room. My approach is that classic pieces anchor a room, which then allows for more free-spirited self-expression—in large upholstered pieces, large case goods, and area rugs. But overall, art should be the actual focal point.

What techniques do you use for innovative furniture placement?

One of the most important has to do with views. Rarely do people just sit and stare blankly out into the garden or out at their view. For me, views are great backdrops for furniture, and I would position a sofa in front of the view. I actually think views within a home are more interesting—what you see when you look down a hall, what are you going to discover? When you're sitting on a sofa, the view through to the next room can be the interesting one.

What about quality? How do you ensure quality in furnishings?

I suggest that people buy the best quality they can afford. That said, people have to honestly assess what the truth is, or they will be spending money for a living room set that they never use. A good piece of furniture is not good if it doesn't work with who you are, the size of your sitting room, and your home. •



Grand or intimate?

How large is the space and how much of your life can be enjoyably lived on it?

Sitting, lounging, sleeping, cooking?

What activities will you pursue? Create a layout that flows well, with conversation areas, space to dine, room to party or chat intimately as works for you. Do you envision a complete outdoor kitchen, a simple portable grill, or something in between?

Style and amenity: Choose a look you love to guide your furnishing and color choices. Honor the style of your home and the nature of your landscape, or indulge a fantasy. Consider the effects of rain, snow, wind, and sun—will you need to protect your furnishings or not want to be bothered? Provide lighting for the space and light the landscape too if that will enhance your experience. •



ABOVE: A large portico makes a gracious outdoor room. This one gives "a nod to old Hollywood" with fluted columns, an iron railing, diamond-pattern tile floor, bold black-and-white striped pillows, and several small tables for intimate meals, cocktails, or tea. (David Jimenez)



LEFT: Taking advantage of an amenable climate where more time is spent outside than in, this terrace is truly an outdoor living room: it is set up with comfortable seating arranged around a coffee table and focused on a monumental fireplace. "The key component to beautiful outdoor rooms," says the designer, "is creating drama." (Jeff Andrews)

OPPOSITE: It's glorious to dine under or view from afar, and it grows like a weed, so don't hesitate to set your heart on a wisteria canopy if you've a large terrace to shade. (Myra Hoefler)

TABLESCAPE

DISPLAY YOUR COLLECTION

Kansas City designer David Jimenez has a penchant for artfully arranged surfaces. Why not follow his cues?

Layer and lean framed photographs against the wall instead of hanging them, to keep the arrangement tight.

Keep your palette simple. Nothing is more powerful than black and white—with one hit of color.

A tray makes anything look richer.

Use a vase with a strong silhouette. Fill it with one type of stem or flower, for impact.



Make It Your Own:



CRYSTAL SPHERE

Always include one thing that reflects light. This solid crystal sphere also adds a strong shape.



LACQUER BOXES

Color is the spark that brings this arrangement to life. Forms that echo each other create interesting rhythms.



TALL VASE

Proportion is all. This understated ceramic vase with chinoiserie accents would look best filled with tall stems.



FRAMED PRINT

Look for interesting prints or photos produced in multiples—they're less expensive than one-of-a-kind artwork.



INSPIRATIONS

Keep It Tidy: Make It Stylish

Clutter isn't soothing, so outfit your bedroom with storage pieces that encourage tidiness and please your eye.

Choose conventional dressers, armoires, and blanket chests with classy lines or an appealing decorative finish (think about what you can display on top as well as hide inside). If closets are scarce, add built-in cupboards in keeping with your architecture. And even if your closets are adequate, give some thought to the door style and finish so you aren't staring at a dull expanse of sliders. You can opt for the unexpected too, almost anything small makes a good bedside table. •



LEFT: The large antique three-door armoire in this big dressing room is so much more interesting to look at than a closet, offers copious storage, makes an elegant complement to the double pedestal table, and has a terrific beveled oval mirror in which to check your garb. (David Jimenez)