

A modern interior design scene featuring a spiral staircase with a black metal railing on the left, a brown leather sofa with a black cushion, and a kitchen island with a white countertop and wooden cabinets on the right. The floor is covered with a black and white geometric patterned rug. The background shows a large window and a brick wall.

# DESIGNING FOR THE SHAPE OF YOUR SPACE

*HOW TO  
MAKE  
IT WORK*

DECOR&YOU®

## *Rectangles. Squares. L's.*

The rooms of your home come in a variety of shapes. Or sometimes no shape at all, as with an open layout that encompasses many functional areas within one space. While decorating, it's necessary to embrace your room's form and learn to design in accordance with principles that enhance favorable qualities and make each individual shape beautiful.

### **Welcome to your simple guide to making the shape of your space work. We will address:**

- The importance of the design elements: space, form, and line
- How-to accomplish your interior design goals to create harmony, balance, and contrast within a variety of room shapes
- The unique decorating challenges you will face as you approach rectangular, L, open, square, round, and odd-shaped spaces
- Design strategies tailored to these specific room shapes
- How-to make the most of your given space for comfort, style, and function







## WHAT IS “SPACE”?

Space defines the physical boundaries of your room. Do not approach this task as simply getting out the tape measure to see if your furniture will fit. Instead, ask yourself how you will use your existing space while staying within its limits.

For example, should small rooms be overcrowded with lots of small accessories? No. Can large rooms embrace big, bold furnishings? Yes.



## WHAT IS “FORM”?

Form encompasses distinct shapes and the unique properties of those shapes as they relate to design principles. This concept does include your room’s shape, but also the shape of your furnishings, light fixtures, and other accessories. Implementing a two to three shape combination within a given space is your key to achieving your goals of harmony, contrast, and balance.



## WHAT IS “LINE”?

Lines are created predominately by your room’s architecture and selected furniture. This element is important as it guides the eye through your space creating movement and visual interest while providing unity between space and form.

- ↔ Horizontal lines can be found in bookshelves, built-ins, tables, and chair backs. They balance the vertical lines in your space for a sense of harmony.
- ↕ Vertical lines are found in windows, doorways, columns, and tall furnishings. Use them strategically to add an illusion of height.
- ↗ Diagonal lines are often found in fabric patterns or select architectural elements such as a staircase. These lines add drama and movement.



**Let’s use these foundational design principles to look at specific room shapes, the challenges you face with them, and what design techniques make them work.**

# A Rectangular Shape



## THE CHALLENGES OF A RECTANGULAR-SHAPED ROOM:

- It can easily feel narrow and claustrophobic.
- It is often difficult to create intimate gathering areas.

## DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR A RECTANGULAR-SHAPED ROOM:

**Utilize built-ins. Not only are they fun and functional, they also have a way of tying your look together and grounding your space.**

- Build to fit your needs. There are many different types of built-ins including: bookcases, additional storage, work and reading desks, and even bars for entertaining.
- Tall built-ins work well at the end of a long space creating the illusion of height to balance the horizontal lines that naturally occur in an elongated room.



## When picking out furniture, select a variety of tailored and minimalist-styled pieces.

- Avoid frills – a long living room needs furnishings with upholstery that fit tight to the form.
- Small-scale furnishings help create a spacious feel.
- Use a variety of pieces instead of the “one coffee table, one sofa” look.
- Narrow furniture emphasizes the long horizontal lines of the room – it is not recommended.







**While most long living rooms are a simple rectangle, some lucky rooms have a little extra something to their shape such as a corner nook, centralized nook, or bay. Take advantage of this additional space to add a little pizzazz to your living room.**

- Create a simple sitting or reading area. Since this space is set apart from the rest of the living room it does not necessarily invite conversation. Let it be a quiet retreat.
- Try a beautiful display piece such as a statue or other work of art. Or opt for a more functional piece like a piano.

### **Learn to balance the dining area with the right table.**

- Long, rectangular dining rooms should start with a long dining table to create a sense of harmony.
- A sequence of round or square pendant light fixtures above a rectangular table will create a desired yet simple contrast within the space.
- Very narrow dining rooms should use an oval-shaped table to cut the hard narrow lines of the space. Then, be careful adding any additional shapes as you could result in a confusing and disjointed design.



### **It is okay to break up the space.**

- Consider separating long living and family rooms into multiple seating areas. A common strategy creates two squares out of the rectangle. Consider what function you want each space to serve. Conversational? Entertainment and television viewing? Quiet reading?
- If you feel brave in the dining room, try two round tables for something unique and edgy. This design works well for small families who do not want to sit around a large table every night, but still want the option to host larger dinner parties.



# An L-Shape



## THE CHALLENGE OF AN L-SHAPED ROOM:

- Creating visual and functional separation.

## DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR AN L-SHAPED ROOM:

**Embrace the L-shape's natural design properties that create openness and flexibility.**

- The L-shape provides design freedom by supplying options as to what you can do with your functional areas also known as the two sides of the L, the short and the long.
- The L-shape instills a sense of openness for both large and small spaces.
- In the kitchen, the L-shape naturally minimizes traffic while inviting simple additions to easily increase functionality. For example, install expansive countertops for stress-free meal preparation and an island for ease of entertaining.





### Design for function in a living room/ dining room combination.

- The side of the “L” that is closest to the kitchen is typically your dining space and contains the short side of the “L”.
- As you add furniture, consider how you want the spaces to open up to one another. Do you want physical separation with a sofa’s back to the dining area? Or do you prefer an ease of flow from one space to the next?
- To keep energy moving from one side of the “L” to the other, use consistent flooring.



### Design for privacy in an L-shaped bedroom.

- There will be a more isolated side of the “L” – find it and create a cozy nook.
- Perfect “cozy nook” uses: sleeping, dressing, or a quiet reading spot.



# An Open Room



## THE CHALLENGE OF AN OPEN ROOM:

Defining each functional area as the living room, dining room, family room, kitchen, etc. because when all “rooms” share space with adjoining areas it can be hard to create boundaries.

## DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR AN OPEN ROOM:

### Construct a clear flow of traffic.

- In an open space, you create the flow of traffic with your furniture placement. Consider how you would transition from the living room to the dining room to the kitchen and then use your furniture to facilitate that natural movement.
- Leave space to comfortably move around furniture at all times.



### Create a unified feeling across all “rooms.”

- The easiest way to accomplish this task is to use a cohesive color scheme. It will maintain a consistent look and feel for harmonious visual appeal.





**Use accessories to help establish definitive functional areas.**

- Try a large area rug to ground the living room and create an obvious sitting area.
- Using a chandelier to dictate where the dining table should go helps solidify that particular space's use.

**Create privacy for the kitchen.**

- Consider installing a half wall across part of the kitchen so that sitting in the living or dining room doesn't mean staring directly into the culinary quarters.





# A Small Square



## THE CHALLENGES OF THE SMALL SQUARE ROOM:

- Creating warmth.
- Avoiding the look of crowded or awkward corners.

## DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR A SMALL SQUARE ROOM:

### Float your furniture to create an inviting atmosphere.

- Pulling furniture away from the walls helps create intimacy.
- The key to this look is to be able to walk around the furniture comfortably. If you can do this, even substantial furniture will work well in a small space.



### Use textural and colorful artwork as your chosen accessories.

- A small room is limited on floor space, so take advantage of the walls to visually fill the room.



### Do not fear colors and patterns.

- The trick is to paint the walls and ceilings the same color as to not let your eye stop at the ceiling line emphasizing the room's small structure.
- Calm the space with solids, tone-on-tone textures, and small prints.
- If you think calm is boring, explore large-scale bold patterns. When implemented correctly, the colors and patterns will actually distract you from the size of the room.
- Multiple patterns require varied scales to create harmony. Too much of the same size becomes overwhelming.







**Use substantial furniture to create comfort and warm invitations to sit down.**

- Do not be tempted by furniture that is too small. Yes, you will have space to walk around, but these miniscule pieces are seldom comfortable.

**Even your bathroom needs to be comfortable.**

- A small square bathroom, often sized at 6-foot by 6-foot, is hardly an easy task to take on and you will need to make some compromises.
- Ditch the bathtub and create a three-quarter bathroom. Bathtubs take up a lot of space physically and visually, so declutter and be satisfied with a sink, toilet, and shower.
- Try positioning one of your three elements in the corner. Typically, the sink or shower works best.



# A Round Space



## CHALLENGES OF A ROUND ROOM:

- There are no right angles.
- Learn to embrace the round shape, not detract from it.
- Customary furniture will not fit perfectly.

## DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR A ROUND ROOM:

When selecting furniture you will either need to spend the money for specially designed pieces that hug your circular wall or avoid placing furniture against the walls at all.

- Placing small furniture in a circular shape creates awkward gaps and detracts from a comfortable setting.
- Opt for a select number of large-scale pieces. Less is more in the already dramatic environment of a round room.

Embrace the windows in a round room as they emphasize the unique shape which is the room's most important and surprising feature.

- Use curtains or other window treatments to highlight the window's curvature.
- Search for curved rods to install, they can be found.
- Separate window treatments on individual windows will work, but for a more dramatic effect try one curtain that sweeps across all windows.



If you have a turret room, this special yet small round space takes unique planning.

- Built-ins will be your best friends.
- A traditional built-in feature for a turret room is the window seat. It is still popular because it is visually attractive, highlights the architecture's curves, and efficiently uses what space is available.
- Less traditional built-ins include: work areas and china cabinets.

A curved bathroom is rare and presents its own challenges.

- Our best tip is to invest in a claw-foot tub as you can pull it away from the curved wall for increased comfort to the eye and body.



# An Odd Shape



## THE CHALLENGES OF AN ODD-SHAPED ROOM:

- Slanted ceilings.
- Recessed or protruding walls.
- Unexpected angles.

## DESIGN TECHNIQUES FOR AN ODD-SHAPE ROOM:

Draw attention away from unusual angles and lines.

- Start with a consistent paint color. Create walls and ceilings that blend together instead of calling attention to fitful angles.
- Neutral backdrops allow focus to be placed on furnishings and accessories drawing the eye away from floors, walls, and ceilings.



Create cheerfulness in an awkward-shaped room as odd angles and peculiar slants have a way of creating dark crevices.

- Ditch the window treatments and let the natural light in.
- Try a floor lamp to brighten dull corners.
- If privacy is a concern, try light fabric window shades in a hue similar to the wall color. It will create a cohesive look and familiar feel.
- Track lighting on dimmer switches can help compensate for when the natural light doesn't reach your space.





**You will need odd furniture to fit the odd-shaped room.**

- Carefully selected furniture styles are your best strategy against distracting the eye from harsh room angles.
- Try glass top tables that can be cut into any size and shape. Keep in mind that rounded corners will offset sharp room angles.
- Avoid bulky pieces that can make a room feel crowded and even more awkward.

- Low-profile dressers may need to be paired with taller bedframes in a sloped-ceiling room where you need to make optimal use of the space. Matching sets simply won't be an option here.
- Dormer areas are often ideal places to install a window seat.


Custom built-ins are always an option if you can't find a piece to fit. Try study nooks or specially made shelving to fit your needs.

**Eye-catching accessories will draw attention away from strange angles as well.**

- Try bright paintings or framed photos centered on the wall to create a focal point that draws the eye in instead of towards the room's corners. Be mindful not to hang anything on a slanted wall.
- Mirrors are tricky to implement as you must avoid reflecting your odd lines and angles. However, if you can hang one across from a window and reflect the sunny outside world you will be doing your room a favor.
- Potted trees will cheer up dark corners.







**Designing for the shape of your space takes some creativity and attention to detail, but anyone can design a beautiful, stylish, and functional room with the right guidance.**

We hope you learned some useful tips today and if you would like more information or a personal consultation on designing your space please contact:

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