

# EVERY-DAY Design Dilemmas

How to take  
the guesswork  
out of  
decorating!



with: Linda Erlam,  
Design Sewlutions

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Every-day Design Dilemmas: How to Take the Guesswork  
Out of Decorating  
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# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. A Floor Plan</b>	<b>3</b>
How a floor plan helps you	4
How to make a floor plan	4
Putting furniture onto a floor plan	7
Room usage list	7
Lighting requirement list	7
Place the Furniture	7
Balance	9
Traffic Flow	9
Some Space Guidelines:	10
TV size:	10
<b>2. How to Light a Room</b>	<b>13</b>
The three types of lighting	14
Place the task lighting	14
Place the ambient lighting	15
Place the mood lighting	16
Check the lighting direction	16
Make sure you have enough lighting	17
How to know how much light you need	17

# CONTENTS continued

<b>3. Coffee Table Size and Shape</b>	<b>19</b>
What do you want the table to do?	20
How you choose	20
<b>4. Make Big, Calm Rooms</b>	<b>23</b>
My favorite bathroom	23
Contrast	27
Colors and energy	28
Create a large-feeling, calming room	29
<b>5. Area Rug: Size and Shape</b>	<b>33</b>
What area rugs do	33
Size and shape	33
Color and print	36
<b>6. Choose the Correct Lamp Size</b>	<b>39</b>
Find the right height	40
Get the correct shade size	40
Choose a lamp shade shape	41
<b>7. Math for the Home Decorator</b>	<b>43</b>
Centimeters vs inches	43
Length vs width	44
Distance around	46
The circumference of an oval	46
Circumference of a circle	47
Self-covered piping fabric requirements	47
How much fabric?	48
Stack-back	48
Pattern matching	49
Square feet	52
Board feet	52
Paint	52

# CONTENTS continued

<b>8. Slipcover or Re-upholster</b>	<b>53</b>
Why slipcover?	54
Why upholster?	56
The difference: upholstery vs. drapery fabric	56
<b>9. Thread Count</b>	<b>59</b>
How these threads are constructed	60
How do you choose a good sheet?	61
Pilling	61
Keep your sheets soft	61
Sheet Fiber content	62
<b>10. Color Undertones</b>	<b>63</b>
Start with the neutrals	64
Clean and dirty	69
<b>11. Outdoor Cushion Know-how</b>	<b>71</b>
Water-proof or water-resistant?	71
Fibers	72
Filler	73
Notions	74
Cleaning	75
<b>12. Foam</b>	<b>77</b>
How to know what you are buying	77
How to know what to buy	78
Cushion wrap	78
Price of foam	78
How to cut foam	78
The Foam Dictionary	79



# INTRODUCTION

In my design practice, I deal with every-day gals, young Moms, empty-nesters and down-sizing retired ladies. You are a smart lot and tend to want to do as much as you can yourselves. You are very often right in your basic design choices; you just need some reassurance and sometimes a bit of advice and maybe a little course correction on occasion. I know you aren't afraid of trying something new and you know when you need help. That's where the idea for this book came from.

This book is for you; it's decorating simplified in the same language we speak to each other day to day. You want solutions to your design problems. You want to know how to solve those problems by yourself and you want to do it with confidence.

This book explains how to make those choices and gives you the background information you need without a lot of insider jargon or fluff. But you have to meet me half-way—in order to complete a project successfully, it's necessary to understand which tools are needed and how to use those tools. And maybe the project is as simple as choosing a coffee table, but we've all seen the results of that project that went astray. It's OK to throw out the recipe once you have the basics down, but understanding the basics has to be step one.

My working mantra these days is: "I'm not trying to be memorable, I'm just trying to be useful." I hope I succeed with this little book.

My website is [designsewlutions.ca](http://designsewlutions.ca) where you'll find reprints of most of my newspaper columns there, new stuff, pictures of projects and whatever else I feel like putting in.

There will be a Volume 2 of Every-Day Design Dilemmas. If you have something you'd like to see included, please let me know. There is a contact me page on my website.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda".





# 1. A Floor Plan

Would you consider making a complicated cake without a recipe?

Or sewing a suit jacket without a pattern?

Or planting your garden without a plan?

You would not do any of these without a plan and expect great results. Arranging a room requires a plan, too. If you take the time to arrange the room on paper first, you can be assured of success. I promise. A floor plan is not just a pattern of where furniture should be placed, it deals with every aspect of living in that room.



A floor plan is number one on the list of things to do if you are considering a room make-over, a renovation, or especially if you are building a new home.

## ***How a floor plan helps you***

- It will tell you the size of the furniture you should have in the room.
- Working with a room usage list, it will tell you where to place lighting in the room and what type of lighting you need.
- It will tell you the size and shape of the coffee table, area rug and dining table.
- It will show you how people will move through the room, and will prevent traffic flow problems—like people walking in front of the TV to move through the room.
- It will help you plan seating for the maximum number of people you foresee having in the room.
- It will tell you how big the TV armoire should be and what size TV is best for your room. Yes it will.
- It will tell you how big the bed can be and what size the bedside tables should be.
- It will tell you how to make the living room conducive to conversations.
- It will show you if the room is “balanced” or not.
- It will save you money because you won’t be buying anything not on the plan.

It takes a bit of time to put one together but once you have done it you will wonder how you managed without it. When you go shopping for a piece of furniture, you will know how big it should be. Think of the time you will save if you can say to the furniture salesman, “My sofa should be 80 inches long, don’t show me anything other than that, please.” It will save you money; no more impulse buying. We have all bought something, thinking, “Oh, I’ll make it work,” only to find it is too small, too tall or too wide and the piece ends up in the garage sale or the thrift store. You will know the shape and size of the piece, either a coffee table, dining table, rug, sectional sofa, or corner cabinet, to name a few.

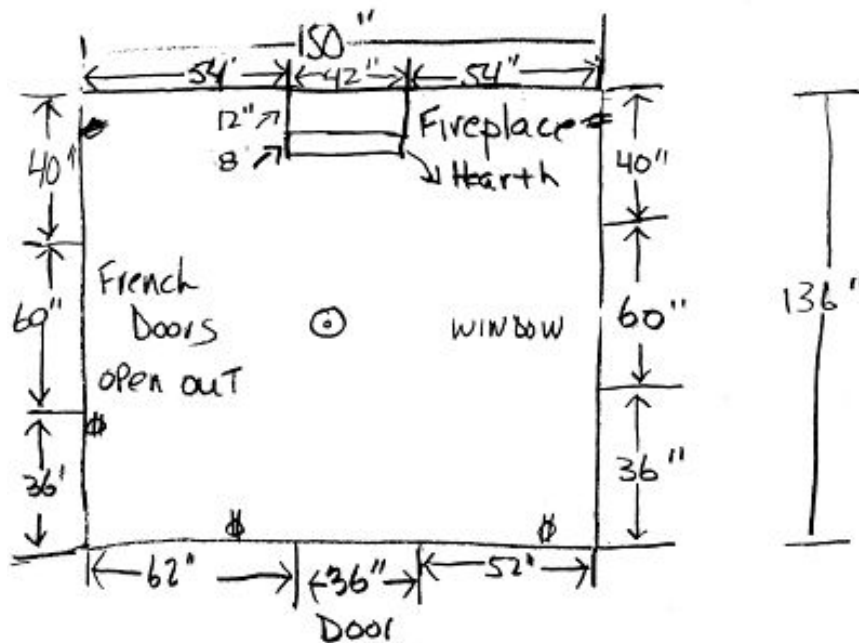
## ***How to make a floor plan***

You can do a floor plan on paper, the “old fashioned way,” or you can do one on any number of free online floor plan programs. This is an instance of old being a bit easier. There can be quite a learning curve in making a floor plan online; by the time you learn all the ins and outs of the program, you could have done a floor plan by hand. The process is the same if you choose an online application or choose to draw on graph paper.

First of all, you do not have to be a drafting genius to do this, it is not a difficult task. You don’t need drawing skills, you just have to be able to read a tape measure and count squares on graph paper. You can do that. But you do need

to do it. It is the base of the design process—it is not a step you can skip. You will refer back to your floor plan over and over. Each time you want to add or change components in the room the floor plan will come into play.


- Get some 1/4 inch graph paper. Each square on the paper will represent 6 inches of floor. If you are a metric type, get metric paper and use 10 cm per square. I have done the floor plans here using the space planning module of Minutes Matter. It's the design software program I use in my business and I used it for all the renderings throughout the book.
- Draw a rough outline of the floor on paper, note the doors and windows.
- Measure the room. Record all the measurements on the rough floor plan in inches (or centimeters) not in feet and inches.



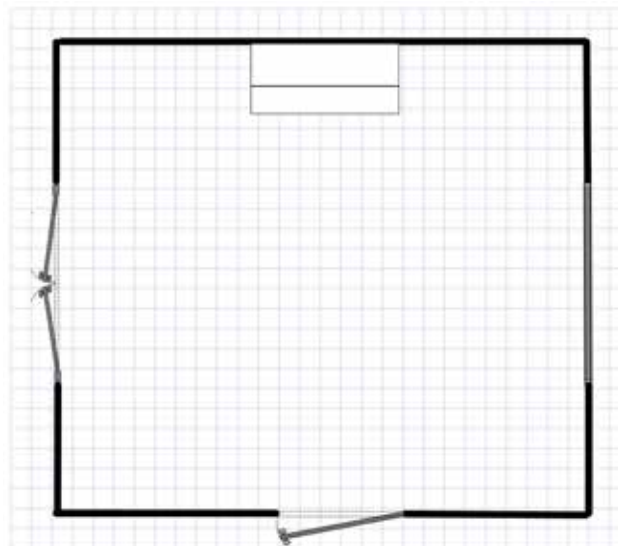
Measure the floor inside the baseboards. For example, wall to wall may be 60 inches but the baseboards take up one inch, therefore on the plan, the floor is drawn as 59 inches. Why? Because if you draw 60 inches and then buy an armoire 60 inches and the floor space is actually only 59 inches, you have a problem.

- Mark the door openings as to the size of the opening, not outside casing edge to outside casing edge. Mark the window inside widths on the floor plan as well, even though they typically do not join the floor; furniture placement is affected by window placement. Include things like the distance from the inside of the window frame to the to corner, or closet door to corner.
- And, even though they are not actually on the floor, indicate the wall electrical outlets, cable or satellite positions and any telephone or internet lines on your rough sketch. They don't have to go on the final plans, but you need to know where they are in the room. Also add the heat vents, radiator if applicable and the fireplace and hearth. Put the doors in and don't forget to indicate which way they swing. If you want the plan to be really snazzy, look up the architectural symbols and use them on your plan. For example:

 indicates a wall outlet.

 indicates a hanging light fixture.

When you have all the rough measurements, make a nice tidy new plan with straight lines. You can do this on graph paper, or plain paper. If you use graph paper, measuring the floor space is as easy as counting squares; if you do it on plain paper, you will have to measure the spaces and convert  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch to 6 inches. You do not record the measurements on the new graph paper—it would become really crowded if you did and remember that each square is equal to 6 inches on the floor so you don't really need the measurements on the plan. After your furniture is positioned you can set up a legend to one side with the footprint inches of each piece of furniture if you want.



## ***Putting furniture onto a floor plan***

Now that you have your floor plan drawn to scale you have done all of the tedious work. Just a bit more homework and then you get to play with the furniture layout.

### ***Room usage list***

Write down what the room is used for and how many people participate in those activities. This should include the possibility, for example, of having seating for 10 in the family room when the kids bring home their “significant others” for Sunday dinner. Do you need one corner for reading? One corner for the computer? Write it all down. This is called the room usage list and it determines the amount of seating, and therefore the type of seating, you need to plan for.

Example: if your dining room table normally seats four, but you need it to seat eight on occasion, you will need a table that expands, the space to expand it into, and chairs to accommodate the extra guests. Ever wonder what the designers are writing on their clip boards on the TV shows? This sort of stuff. (There is a sample of the one I use at the end of this chapter.)

### ***Lighting requirement list***

Write down the type of lighting each activity requires and any special furniture for the task. For example; a reading corner requires:

- a comfy chair,
- a table or floor lamp,
- a small side table
- perhaps a foot stool

Each person seated at a sofa needs access to a table surface.

If you are doing your plan on graph paper, find some furniture templates online, print them and cut them out. These are outlines of furniture drawn to a 1/4-inch scale; you may have to search a bit to find metric templates. Write the represented size on the piece. If you have pieces of furniture that must stay in the room, make templates for those pieces from graph paper—make them to scale.

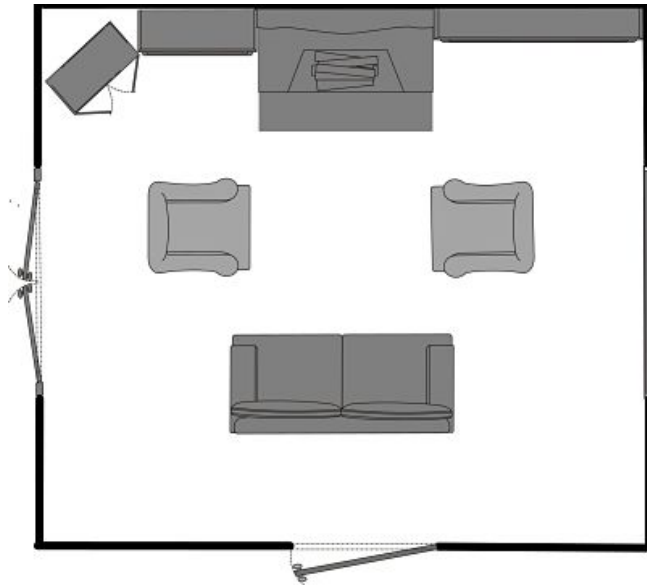
## ***Place the Furniture***

This is the fun part.

Ask yourself this question: “What is the function of this room, and what feature of the room is central to this function?” The answer is the focal point: the picture

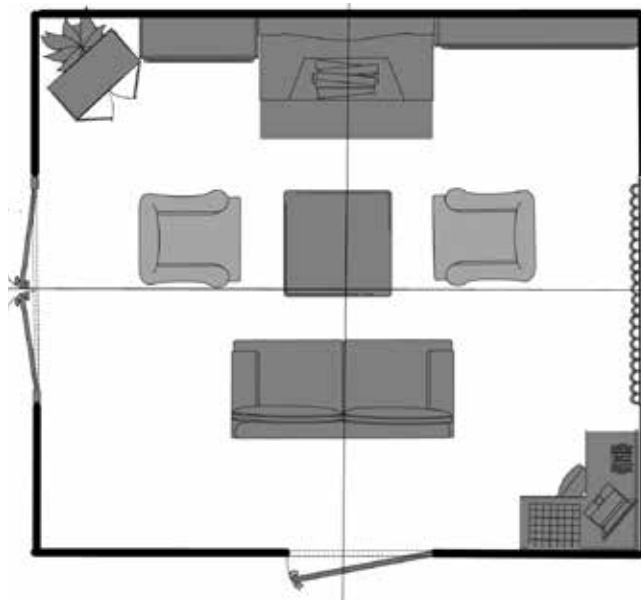
window or fireplace in the sitting room, the TV in the family room or the bed in the bedroom are the focal points. (Hint: read the room usage list, it will tell you the answer.)

If you are creating a focal point, such as with a TV armoire, place it on the floor plan first. Place it in the most logical position. Consider where the sofa may go, where the doors in the room are, how much space you need to move through the room, and place the armoire accordingly.



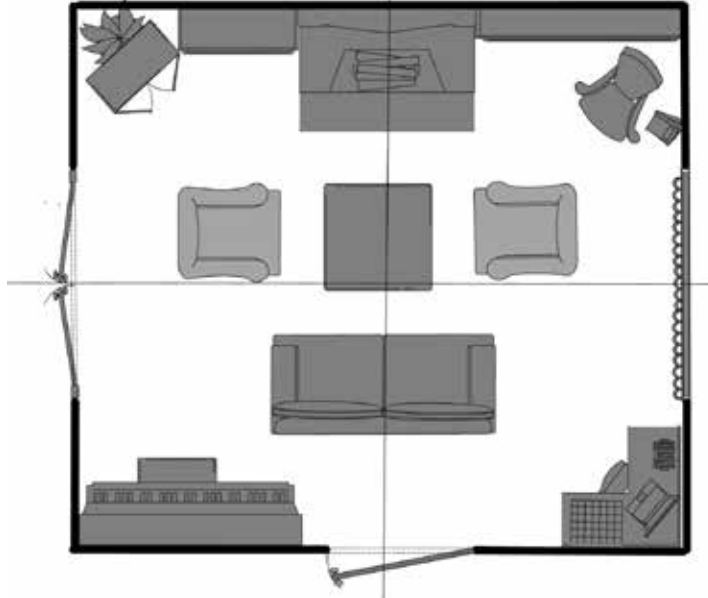
In sitting rooms, like living and family rooms, place the most important piece of furniture oriented toward the focal point. Place the sofa facing the fireplace or window in the formal living room where the window is the focal point, or toward the fireplace if that is the focal point. The sectional sofa or grouping of recliners should face the TV armoire in the family room. In this sample room, the chairs swivel for TV viewing.

Choose the secondary pieces of furniture and place them on the plan. In a sitting room, these pieces are the side chairs, in a bedroom this would be the



main dresser or chest of drawers, in a dining room, this would be the buffet and hutch - placed after the dining table and chairs. Place the dining room chairs with thought to moving the chair back to get up. You need the chair depth plus 24 inches to the wall and you need at least 30 inches in front of a dresser with drawers. Don't forget the door swings, and leave enough room for closet doors too.

Don't forget your end tables for the sofa and side tables in the bedroom. A rule of thumb in a sitting room is that every seat should be within



18 inches of a table surface. So, you may not need end tables if you are using a large coffee table, or, you may use several small tables and forego a coffee table.

### ***Balance***

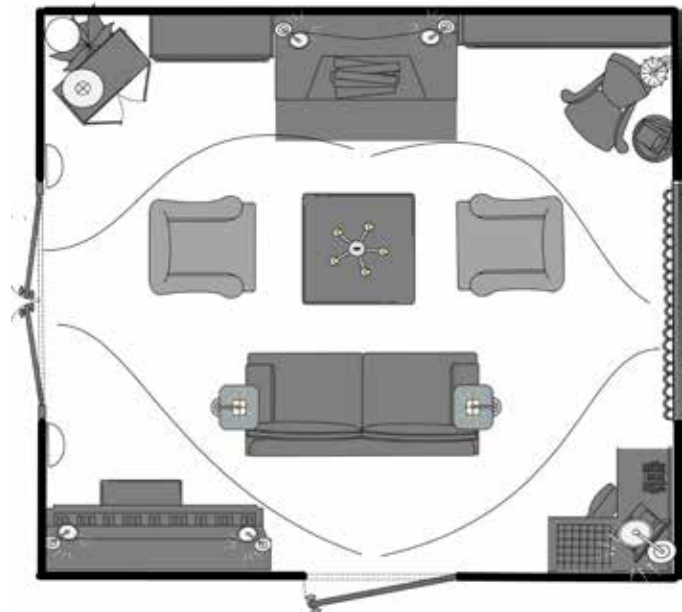
Draw an erasable line through both the horizontal and vertical of your floor plan. (Or slip your plan in a plastic sleeve and use a dry erase marker.) Look at

each quadrant. They need to have similar visual weight. For example: if the sofa and side chairs are all on one half of the plan, the remaining half may appear empty and the room off-balance.

Move the furniture as best you can to create a balance between the areas while maintaining the function. Add a large plant to a corner, perhaps a decorative screen. Maybe a table and reading chair; maybe a small book case. In this room, the piano fits the empty corner perfectly.

### ***Traffic Flow***

Plot the traffic patterns on your floor plan and try to adjust the furniture so the major traffic through the room does not pass between the focal point and the main seating area. This can be tricky. It's important to remember that the Cable Guy is not an interior decorator. Where he says the cable outlets must be located is not necessarily the best place for the TV. Be firm when he comes to install things or you may need to have the outlets moved. If you have the floorplan in place before he comes, you will be well ahead of the game.



You have a good traffic flow if people can move through the room without passing between the seats of the main conversation area. Furniture placement can help direct the traffic flow, but remember that we tend to find the easiest, most direct route through a room and if there is a path that is easier than the one you “expect” everyone to take, you may just find yourself with people walking between the sofa and TV. In that case, move something. It is easier to adjust the floor plan than try to re-train a family. Sometimes.

On the TV set of “Frasier,” the sofa was oriented toward the TV and away from the fireplace. But it created a pathway leading from the door to the coat rack, dining area and kitchen that kept people from walking in front of the sofa, Martin’s magnificent recliner, and the TV.

### ***Some Space Guidelines:***

- Maximum space between 2 people for conversation: 9 feet
- Between a sofa or chair and a coffee table: 18-20 inches
- Between 2 armchairs: 12 inches
- Between a chair or sofa and a wall (for access):  
the chair depth plus 24 inches
- Between the side of the bed and wall: 24 inches
- Between twin beds: 24 inches
- Minimum distance in front of a dresser with drawers: 30 inches

### ***TV size:***

Divide the distance from the screen, in inches, by 3. This is the minimum sized screen for viewing at this viewing distance. Divide the distance by 1.5 for the maximum sized screen for your space without screen distortion.

*Example:*

*If you are sitting 6 feet away from the screen,*

*6 feet = 72 inches*

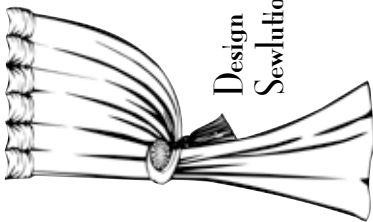
*72 inches/3 = 24 inches*

*72inches/1.5 = 48 inches*

Therefore, a 24 inch screen is the minimum size you need, and a 48-inch screen is the maximum.

The horizontal center should be at the same height as seated eye level.





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## Room Usage and Lighting Requirements Check List

Client: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Room: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Task #	#people	Description	Seating/Furniture Required	Lighting
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Notes:





## ***About the Author:***

I have been writing most of my life; I wrote award-winning essays in grade school and I moved right along to writing heart-wrenching poetry in my sixteenth year that still makes me sad. My Mom helped me with my first self-sewn dress when I was six. After working with computers, and then working in the decor section of a huge fabric retail store, I took the plunge and completed my Interior Design training in the mid 90's. Writing and designing led me to create a design advice column in the "Lakeshore News" called "Design Dilemmas" six years ago. Those columns and the questions my clients and column readers ask me over and over led me to write this book.

*"We continue to love the drapery Linda made for us! I'm particularly fond of the kitchen ones and am thankful for the privacy and energy efficiency that they afford as well as her creativity in finding a solution to our problem window." ~ Karen A.*

*"Linda showed me what my options were for window coverings and her ideas and suggestions opened up the rooms more than I imagined they could be. She gave me suggestions on how to use colors from my feature painting to keep the space bright and feeling open. One of my favorite experiences with Linda was when she taught me how to recover my kitchen chair seats. She guided me through a Do-It-Yourself project and in about an hour and a half I had them done! The very best part of all is that Linda was able to help me get EVERYTHING I wanted done in my house within my budget." ~ Tracy L.*

*"Linda is a master at her craft whether it's decorating or writing. She listens to you and then, if warranted, will make suggestions. She let's you know if something will or won't work and then explains why she thinks that way. I really appreciate her honesty. Linda is great at listening to your vision and then making it a reality. I recently worked with her on our bedroom makeover; she made it fun, stress free and kept me under budget. I would highly recommend Linda's services." ~ Dianne P.*



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