



Be Smart: Create A Space Plan Before You Start

By MaryAnn Shanks

Before embarking on a new design adventure, the first thing any interior designer “worth their salt” should do is put together a comprehensive plan for the space. If you have hired – or are about to hire – a designer, you should insist on a space plan upfront.

A space plan will give you and your designer clear direction on the logistics of the room. If questions or issues arise during the implementation process, it’s easy to refer back to the space plan for clarification.

The first step in developing a good space plan involves a lot of brainstorming between you and your designer. This is the time to be brutally honest. How do you live? Will you *really* use the space for its intended purpose? For example, don’t put the time and money into creating a formal living room if you never entertain on a grand scale. That space might be enjoyed more often as a pool room, a music room, or an in-home theater.

A space plan will also take into consideration existing pieces you already have, that you’d like incorporated into the room. A good designer will tour the rest of your house, noting furniture or other items that might work better in the new space. Once you’ve selected which items go into the space plan, the designer can use those beloved pieces to anchor the room.

Other things to consider while developing your space plan:

- **Establish ideal furniture placement.** Space plans are an easy way to get a “bird’s eye view” of your space – so you can better place furniture, leave clear walkways and make sure the room isn’t over-crowded.
- **Adjust the room layout.** Space plans make it easy to add or subtract pieces, insert lighting or electrical, and determine sizes for area rugs and carpet inserts.
- **Build your shopping list.** Once the layout has been achieved, creating a comprehensive shopping list is simple! A good space plan keep purchases reasonable and helps you stick to your budget.

If you aren't working with an interior designer, it's still imperative you create a space plan before designing a room. There are several options available to help you achieve this goal. Most reputable furniture stores will put together a space plan for you, especially if they think you're a serious buyer. Or, you can purchase a space-planning program for your computer. (It's well worth the small investment, especially if you have several rooms to redesign.)

If you're generating a do-it-yourself space plan, keep in mind these design guidelines:

- Always allow 32 to 36" behind a chair in an eating space
- Coffee tables should always be 12" to 18" from seating pieces
- Allow 36" to 48" for major walkways
- Allow 18" for scooter spaces
- To make small rooms appear larger and more space efficient, run the majority of furniture around the perimeter
- Keep in mind the height *and* depth of chairs and sofas. It is very easy to over- or under-size them.
- Before you order anything for your space – measure, then measure again!

Just remember, taking time to plan your project upfront will help you avoid expensive mistakes and create an inviting environment you'll enjoy for years to come.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Interior designer MaryAnn Shanks is the owner of M. Shanks Design, a full-service firm offering residential and commercial design services to suit every style and budget; based in Orange County, California. For more information, or to schedule your own two-hour, flat rate design consultation, call (949) 654-2488 or visit www.mshanksdesign.com