



# Rules of Design

Some rules are meant to be broken: occasionally playing hooky, having breakfast for dinner, or skipping the work-out once in a blue moon, in favour of an indulgence. On the other hand, certain rules should be followed at all costs, including some rules of design. As a designer, these are the three rules I always follow and why you should, too.

**Always put function first.** There's no arguing the appeal of aesthetically pleasing pieces, but if they don't serve a purpose, they are just "filler." Don't get me wrong, sometimes that function is to adorn, or to serve a more practical purpose. But at the end of the day, if it doesn't contribute to the space in a clear way, it's what I call "clutter."

Before you bring anything new into your home, or make the call to hold onto an existing item, ask yourself: Does it work? Does it fit within the style and space parameters? Do I need it/love it/want it? If the answer is "yes" to all three, then by all means, find a great place for it. But if you're on the fence, then consider whether this particular item might be better suited in another room, or perhaps in another home!

**Measure twice, buy once.** I've adapted this golden rule a bit from its original form, but the meaning holds true. Do your prep work. Measuring is a small but meaningful step, and when it comes to spending your hard-earned money, it's worth repeating: measure



before you buy anything. Not doing so can result in having to spend more than is required – or desired – on a given item.

**Measure your space, and have these standard specs on hand as you plan your space:**

- Seating is typically about 18 inches high. The dimensions of your sofa and chairs will factor into your choice of coffee table and side tables.
- The length of your coffee table should measure approximately two-thirds the length of the sofa.
- When arranging furniture in a sitting area, leave a gap of about three to 10 feet between seats.
- The dining table should allow 30 inches per diner.
- Hang artwork at eye-level, about 56 inches from the floor, or six to 12 inches above a surface, like a fireplace mantel.
- Leave a one- to two-foot gap between the area rug and wall.

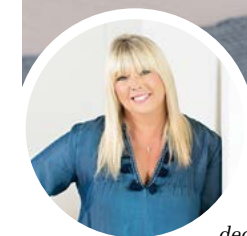
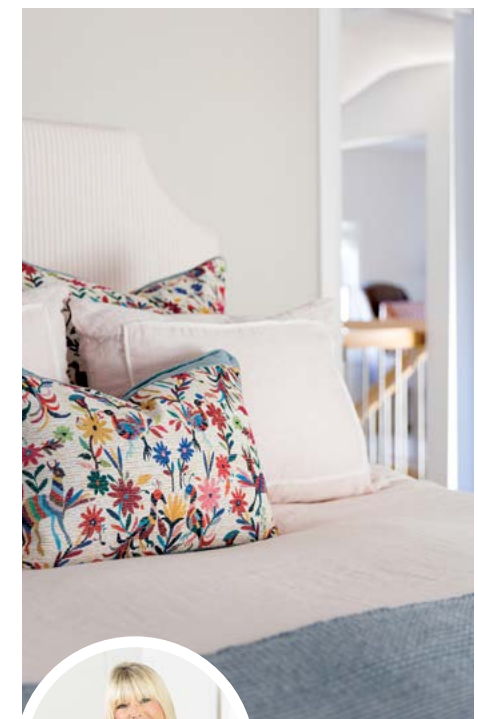
When measuring, look beyond the walls of the room and consider how the piece of furniture will need to move through the home, in order to reach its final resting place. Measure doorways, hallways, the elevator and ceiling height, taking note of windows, doorways and any other large-scale furnishings or focal points that may affect its positioning.

**Don't fill every inch.** I can't stress this rule enough. Negative space, or those areas strategically left empty, bring balance to your "stuff" and create breathing room for your furniture, accessories and art to shine. Too much furniture, tchotchkes on every surface, and shelves crammed creates the appearance of clutter. Aesthetically speaking, less really is more. From a practical perspective, leaving strategic gaps between furnishings gives you room to move through the home.

Good design should be both beautiful and practical. It does not have to be complicated, and certainly not difficult to achieve. When decorating your space, do what feels right, and you can't go wrong.

By Bren Petrunick

Since 1994



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