HOW TO DESIGN A LIVING ROOM INTERIOR *that works*

By Sam Bheda

For most people their living room is an often-used space; one that is used for relaxing, watching television, reading the weekend papers and entertaining friends and family. As far as rooms go, this one has to work hard with its multiple uses, but you also want it to look good.

So how do you design a room that balances practicality with aesthetic beauty? Focus on the five elements I've outlined below and you'll soon be on your way to having a living room that's comfortable and stylish and will function effortlessly.

1. Define a focal point in the room

Every living room needs to have a focal point. This could be a fireplace, a key piece of artwork, an architectural feature such as an exposed brick wall or even built-in joinery. The aim is to help draw the eye to an area of visual interest in the room. It can also help you determine the layout of the furniture within the space.

2. Consider the arrangement of the furniture

The arrangement of the furniture will be dictated by how you use the living room. Think about the size and shape of the room and the amount of seating you need. As living rooms bring people together, arrange the furniture so that it promotes conversation and interaction. If you have a small room, it's best not to fill it full of furniture - you want to ensure everyone can move around easily without having to squeeze through awkward spaces. If you're lucky to have a large living room, it's a great opportunity to create zoned activity areas, for example a seating arrangement for conversation or an area for reading and quiet contemplation.

3. Factors to think about when using colour

It's amazing how colour can transform the entire look and feeling of a room. If you're not very confident in using colour, an effective way to incorporate it is by introducing an accent colour, for example, within soft furnishings and accessories, set against a neutral backdrop. An alternative is to pick one colour and then incorporate its different shades and tones into the room. The colour scheme you choose will set the overall mood: blues, greens and purples evoke a cooler feeling, whereas reds, yellows and oranges evoke a feeling of warmth. When choosing colour, you should take into account other factors such as the amount of natural light the room gets, the direction it faces (south-facing rooms get a lot of natural light, whereas north facing rooms don't get as much, which makes them more challenging when it comes to choosing colour) and importantly, what colours you like and dislike!
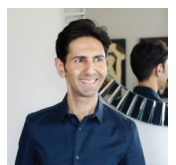
4. Layer the lighting within the room

In order to create a living room interior that's relaxed and comfortable, you should have a number of different light sources within the space, which will help create a layered effect. Architectural lighting, including down-lights and lighting within joinery, provide the ambient or background lighting for a room. Table lamps, floor lamps, wall lights and ceiling pendants provide more decorative and task lighting. When planning the lighting, and in order to execute a more layered effect, aim to have a combination of the latter, ideally with lamps that have a warmth level of 2,700 kelvin or under.

5. Artwork to provide the finishing touch

As soon as you put artwork up in a room, it begins to come alive. There are many factors to consider when hanging art and pictures including scale, balance, composition and lighting, but the key thing for most displays is to ensure that the size of the artwork is relative to the wall space it will go onto. Generally, if you have a large expanse of wall, the artwork should be of relative scale. If you have a large number of smaller pieces, you can cluster them together, arrange them in a grid or linear formation and so on. Also think about the colours within the artwork and how they'll complement the rest of the interior, though don't be afraid to use a piece that's not entirely in keeping with the scheme - it keeps things interesting and after all, it's your living room!

Whatever your personal tastes in interiors, the key elements I've outlined above will help guide your thinking when you're planning and designing a room.

■ **Sam Bheda is an Suffolk-based interior designer. He designs beautiful homes for private clients which embrace their individuality and works with commercial clients to deliver interiors that help unlock value. Find out more at www.sambheda.com**