Elements of Design

The elements of design are **shape/form**, **texture, color**, **line**, and **space**. These are the tools used to design a room or space.

Shape/Form

Shape is two-dimensional and appears flat while form is three-dimensional with length, width, and depth. (Square is a shape; box is a form.) **Form** is the structure of an item.

Words to describe shape include: square, rectangle, circle, oval, triangle, curved, wavy

Words to describe form include: cube, box, ball, cylinder, pyramid, free form, sphere

The chair above shows a number of rectangles with curved corners rather than sharp edges. The overall form of the chair is boxy.

Texture

Texture is the surface quality of an item. It is how something feels when it is touched or looks like it would feel if touched.

Words to describe texture include: rough, smooth, soft, prickly, squishy, grainy, hard, soft

The chair above is leather, an example of a commonly used material. Leather looks and feels both soft and smooth, slick, cold or crushed around the buttons. The back is textured by buttons so it may be bumpy and firm while the seat cushion looks softer.

Color

Color is what we see when light is reflected.

Words to describe color include: hue, value, intensity

Hue: the name of the color (yellow)

▲ **Value:** lightness or darkness (pale yellow versus dark mustard yellow)

◀ **Intensity:** brightness or dullness (soft yellow versus fluorescent yellow)

Line

Line is any mark greater in length than width.

Words to describe line include: vertical, horizontal, straight, curved, diagonal, thick, thin, dashed, zigzag, continuous, jagged, smooth

The chair at the right shows straight lines in the legs, seat, and chair back. The straight lines are both horizontal and vertical. There are curved lines in the chair back and between the front legs and diagonal lines between the legs on the sides.

Space

Space is the area between and around objects and the area that the object occupies. In a room you have a defined space so it's important to consider how much of the space each object will use. For this reason, space is an added element in home decor.

Words to describe space include: cramped, crowded, open, uncomfortable, comfortable, cozy, noisy, warm, cold

The depth and width of chairs A and B are similar. They occupy the same amount of actual space. However, chair A is light and delicate while chair B is heavier, making the amount of visual space they occupy different.

A

B

File: Youth and 4-H

. . . and justice for all
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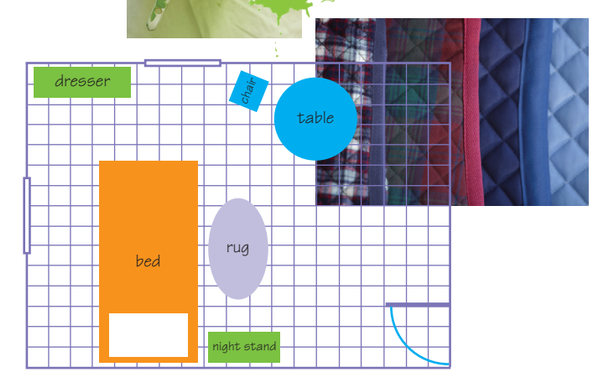
PULLING IT TOGETHER

Elements and Principles of Design in Home Improvement

By learning and using the elements and principles of design, you will increase your understanding of how and why some things work together and some simply "don't look right."



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

Principles of Design

The principles of design (**emphasis, balance, proportion, rhythm, and unity**) are how we use the tools (elements) to create the desired look.

Emphasis

Emphasis draws your attention to a certain part of the room.

◀ The primary colors in the poster and the striped quilt or red pillow may be the first thing you see.

◀ Contrast between the white furniture and bright, intense colors or the butterfly on the wall may be the first thing you notice.

Formal or Symmetrical

Balance

Balance means that both sides appear to be equal even if they are not identical. Formal or symmetrical balance means if you draw a line down the center, both sides are identical. Informal or asymmetrical balance means if you draw a line down the center, both sides appear to be equal in visual weight although not identical.

The dressers illustrate formal (or symmetrical) balance and informal (asymmetrical) balance.

Informal or Asymmetrical

Proportion

Proportion refers to the relationship of parts within an item. Scale compares size. Above are two rocking chairs. All the parts (seat, back, legs, and spindles) are in proportion to each other. However, the big chair would not be the correct size or scale for a toddler while the child's rocker would not work very well for an adult to sit in.

In this room all the furniture is of a consistent size, and the scale is appropriate for an older youth.

Rhythm

Rhythm is a feeling of movement as it directs your eye around the room. It is achieved through the repetition of the design elements of shapes, forms, colors, textures, or lines.

In this room, rhythm is achieved through the use of textures and repetition of color and line. The white, shiny, smooth wood guides your eye to the smooth striped bedspread and on to the white smooth dresser. Repeating the bright intense colors guides your eye from the bedspread to the walls.

Unity

Unity is achieved when all the elements and principles work together as a whole to create a look or theme.

In the room above, straight bold lines and heavier wood give a more sporty, active appearance.

In the room above, bright colors of pink and purple, flowers, butterflies, and the curves of the white wood make this room softer, yet energetic from top to bottom.

Room setups courtesy of Redekers.

PRINCIPLES...PRINCIPLES...PRINCIPLES...PRINCIPLES...PRINCIPLES...PRINCIPLES...PRINCIPLES...PRINCIPLES...