



Planning Essentials

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ understand how to present interior projects using verbal and graphic communication skills,
- ✓ explain how to select materials, finishes, mood and sample board techniques.

Planning Essentials

To ensure how best the interior design of a room allows it to function you will first have to go back to basics. This involves deciding on how a space can be divided into different zones; what should be done about the wiring, walls, ceilings, floors, lighting and windows; what can be improved and how. The result of this analysis will form the framework on which you can add whatever mood or style you choose. A good design is as much about practicality, comfort and detail as about mood and style. However beautiful the window treatments, however original the colour schemes, however splendid the furnishings, no one will appreciate it if the overall room is not comfortable to live in and does not function as it should.

Information Gathering

Before deciding upon any scheme, a designer requires a complete and thorough understanding of the client's mind and needs. Any competent designer who is asked to improve a home scheme or to plan one from scratch would start by finding out their client's tastes and the factors that can make them feel more comfortable, how they live their lives, how they would like to live their lives in an ideal world and how much they are prepared to spend. One can start with the availability of budget and can then work backwards from there, in the light of money available for the project. Once the designer is clear about the availability of budget he can ask his client the questions to find out exactly what the client's needs are.

These questions may vary according to whether the work involves re-doing a room or a whole house or apartment, or completely starting from scratch. The questions cover the four main aspects of the work:

- Function
- Practicalities
- Aesthetics
- Budget

Function

- How long do you plan to live in this home?
- Are there, or are there likely to be, children in the household? If there are children right now how many are there and what are their ages? (this affects the room planning)
- Are there any pets in the house? If so what kind? (this affect the finishes and surfaces used)
- Are there any elderly relatives living with you, or likely to be? (if so you will need to think about good lighting on the stairs, corridors and hall ways, non-slip bathroom floors etc)
- How many people stay at home for the whole day? (this may affect the colours and lighting)
- What are the respective needs of each member of the household? Are these needs likely to change?

- Where does the family feel more comfortable eating?
- Who uses the living room most?
- How many people do you usually entertain at once?
- How often do you entertain? And why?
- In which room do you entertain the most?
- If your children have friends in, where do they entertain them?
- Do you feel that the overall space in the house is adequate?
- What is the minimum number of rooms you think you need?
- Is the room in need of total redecoration? Could your present facilities be improved?
- Where do you and your partner like to sit most and on what? Do you need different chair backs and seat heights? Where do you like to work when paying bills and writing letters, etc?
- What kind of bed and mattress do you both prefer?
- Is bedroom lighting as good as it could be?

Practicalities

- How up to date is the wiring? Do you need to add any new electric sockets? Does your wiring comply with safety requirements? Is it adequate for your present and future needs?
- What is the state of the woodwork, floors, ceilings and walls?
- Are there enough electric sockets in the right place?
- Would it be any improvement to install long windows and French doors somewhere?
- Are any existing air conditioning units unsightly, and if so can they be improved upon?
- Do you need to fix burglar or smoke alarms?
- Does the existing hardware - such as door handles, taps, and light switches, etc. need replacing or re-brassing?
- Are there nice floor boards under the existing flooring? Do they need repairing or replacing? Would you like to have a different kind of floor?

If an answer to any of these questions would mean major works, such as re-wiring or re-plumbing, re-flooring or repairing a damaged wall, this obviously must be done before re-decorating and should be considered in the overall budget.

Aesthetics

- Is your taste in decorating traditional, modern, romantic, minimalist or something else? Does it depend on the style of the room or house?
- Do you and your partner have similar tastes or different ones? Have you agreed to each have your own way in different rooms? Or do you have to compromise?
- Do you know what colour schemes you want? Are you open to suggestions?
- What styles do you admire?
- Which styles would you prefer for any particular room?
- Is it possible to include the existing furniture, if any?
- Are there any colours or styles you and your partner dislike?

Budget

- What is the maximum you can spend on your project?
- Are you truly comfortable with this budget?
- Have you researched current prices for merchandise and services?
- What must be spent? Where can you save?
- Can you make sensible compromises on items that could be recycled to less important rooms if it means that better things can be afforded in the furniture?
- If you could list the ten luxuries that would make your home look more attractive what would they be?

Sketching up Ideas

Once the basic concept has been established, it requires further development and refinement. For the very preliminary ideas there is no substitute for sketching. While not every interior designer is necessarily a fine artist, a sketch, however crude it might be, will help to visualize how a design idea might look within a space and whether it is worth working up further. These sketches might take the form of freehand perspectives or rough layouts, which can then be worked up on tracking paper, or thin layout paper over the original survey drawing.

Floor Plans

Floor plans or sketch plans are invaluable for working out any changes, and for deciding on the positions of new electric sockets, lighting and furniture. To draw a floor plan, or sketch plan, first make a preliminary plan for the room. Next measure the lengths of walls, projections and recesses and mark these on your drawing where appropriate. To double check that you have got the exact measurements, add together the individual lengths of features and see if they are equal to the total length of the wall. To complete the survey take notes of the following measurements:

- Ceiling's height;
- Height, width and swing of doors;
- Height width and position of the windows;
- Services (gas point, radiators, plumbing, light switches etc.)
- Architectural features (dado, niche, arch, floor-level change, sloping etc.);
- Room orientation (whether it faces north, south, east or west);
- Existing finishes (material, type, colour and condition).

Now it is time to start the drawing. This needs to be to scale, that is, an exact replica of the room's shape but in miniature. The easiest way to do this is to use a finely squared graph paper. The conversion ratio of your large scale measurements into this small-scale drawing will depend upon the gauge of the squared paper.

Using a well sharpened pencil start drawing: a useful size has large squares of 2 cm and small ones of 2 mm: for example, you calculate that one small square is equal to 10 cm/4inches - based on this, your drawing will be one fifth of the actual size of the room or a ratio of 1:50. According to this if your measurement is 40cm/16inches, you will draw a line four small squares long, and so on.

Erase any door openings, marking their clearance with an arc drawn to scale, then mark in fixtures or odd corners, windows, radiators, electric sockets, television points, phone jacks and air conditioners etc. Write the room title and a note of the scale you have used.

Decorating Schedule

The decorating schedule is another important aid, which serves as a reminder of exactly what is to be done. Decorating schedules can be prepared at the same time as the sample board and can be kept with the sample boards for daily reference. Write down the room's name at the top and write down the following headings down the side of the paper, leaving enough space between them for clear descriptions:

- Walls
- Floors
- Ceilings
- Woodwork
- Window treatments
- Lighting,
- and so on

Assembling a Scheme

So far we have discussed various elements that go into making up a scheme. Now we will consider how these are assembled into a pleasing whole. In fact most of us practise putting together schemes nearly every day of our lives. We get up.....and we get dressed, we choose a style that is appropriate for the activities we intend to carry out, we select materials that are suitable and choose colours that flatter us. We decide whether to go for a harmonious outfit or one of contrasts, we determine in what proportions each colour will appear and we may even choose to include a patterned scarf or tie to bring the assemble together. Finally, we pick out appropriate accessories to complement our outfit. Formulating a design scheme for a home is very much the same process.

It should be remembered that no room in a house should be seen in isolation but viewed from an adjacent area and the whole home should have a sense of cohesion. It is important that each room scheme works well with its neighbours. That does not mean that the schemes must be same, but they should have some linking factor. For instance, a dominant colour in one room might be used as an accent colour in the next. In a smaller property laying the same carpet throughout often produces a harmonious result.

A professional designer takes few short cuts, preferring instead to do thorough research before finalizing a scheme. Skilled at visualizing though designers might be, they still need to see how all the components of a scheme interact, and the best way to do this is to make a sample board for each room on which they are working.

Putting together a scheme is in some ways even easier than choosing an outfit to wear. Samples can be of great benefit. Here are some tips on handling them:

- Most manufacturers are willing to give small cuttings of fabrics, wall papers and carpets without charge.
- For a fabric that is pivotal to your scheme and which has a large pattern repeat, a larger sample will better show how the material will look when made up. If one of these bigger samples is not available, then buy 1 metre for testing purposes.
- Always view samples in the room where they will appear. Wallpapers can be stuck to the wall with masking tape, fabrics pinned to existing window dressings and paint tried out on a board held up to the wall.
- It is important that the samples are seen on the plane on which they will finally appear; for example, carpet flat on the floor, upholstery fabric on a sofa, curtain fabric gathered at a window. Fabric can take on a very different appearance depending on whether it is laid flat, as in a bed cover, or gathered into drapes as at a window.
- Gather more samples than you actually require for a room. This gives an opportunity to see how they work together and to reject the ones that are unsuitable.
- Clear plastic file pages are suitable for collecting samples. Label each for the title of the room for which it has been selected. When all the schemes have been gathered, lay each next to the one which it will adjoin in the house. This will allow you to judge if they link together well.
- When you are building a scheme around existing furnishing, you will need colour samples of these items so that you can see how your new colours will blend with the old.

Making a Sample Board

There has never been a better time for interior design. Numerous ranges of paints, both modern and traditional colours, wallpapers and a diverse collection of good quality, affordable soft furnishing fabric are now available. To find out about the decorating style, the client can be asked some questions.

Question Check list

- What are your favourite colours?
- What furnishings do you need to keep?
- How do you want to live in your home?
- How much entertaining do you do?
- How long do you intend to live in your home?
- How much can you spend now, next year and the year after including housekeeping and maintenance?

At the same time there are some things that cannot be changed. When you are looking for ideas for a particular room, bear in mind its aspect, the geographical location and the character of the house.

Just as room plans need to be a true representation of the room in miniature, it is important for sample concept boards to reflect the right mix and balance of colours and materials in a scheme. These boards help the designer to move on from the methodology of the design process towards a creative response and provide useful parameters in which to work. Assembled in the same way as a collage, they tend to comprise of magazine cuttings, photographs, and sketches that evoke the style or theme of the intended design. These boards successfully convey the essence of a design in a way that the more conventional presentation materials may not. They are usually put together in the same way as a collage with an assembly of cuttings from brochures, newspapers, magazines, photographs, and sketches that convey the style or theme the designer has in mind. These boards can also incorporate interesting textural items such as paper, fabric samples or leaves.

When making a sample board, try to position samples according to their location in the room: for instance, carpet at the bottom of the board, wall and curtain samples near the top and furnishing samples near the middle. It is also good to gauge the size of the sample according to the size of the area it will cover in the room: for example your wall covering sample should be much larger than your cushion fabric sample.

Artist's mounting board of A2 size forms an ideal base for your display of samples, though any neutral coloured board of similar size could be substituted. Simply attach the sample squares to the board - double sided tape is the easiest method- and label each one with its purpose, 'curtain fabric', 'floor coverings' and so on. If it helps you to visualize the finished room, include any other items that will form part of the scheme, such as illustrations of light fittings and furniture. It is also a good idea to label each board with its room title, especially, if the whole house has to be decorated.

When the board is complete, you will be surprised to see the finished scheme; the mix of colours, the number of textural contrasts and array of patterns all working together. Any imbalance in the scheme should show up now. Perhaps your scheme is too dark or too bland. Perhaps it has too few shiny surfaces or too many patterns. All these elements will be demonstrated in your sample board and can be corrected at this early inexpensive stage.



Scheme Sheet

As a back up to a concept board, or when there is little time to finish the concept board, there is another system of recording a scheme that professionals use. It is referred to as a scheme sheet but it is in essence a sample board. Unlike a sample board it requires less artistry and can be made up in no time.

The scheme sheet consists of a form, which can be easily drawn up by hand or produced on a personal computer and which slots into a plastic file. This can then be filed in an A-4 size ring binder and transported where ever you like. Simply fill in the title of the room on the top of the page and below add each surface you are going to represent by a sample. In the centre column write any information you consider relevant to describe the finish or material in question. In the last column attach a small sample of the material described. In the case of a patterned material, select a section that shows as many colours as possible.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Estate Planning Essentials, (2011), By Enodare*
- ✓ *Essentials of Management, (2010), By Harold Koontz*