

The Finishing Touches

Unit 13

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Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this unit the candidate will be able to :

- ✓ describe the use of accessories and other work of art for the success of an interior
- ✓ conclude a room's interior by applying finishing touches appropriately and skilfully.

Once all the ground work has been done, it has to be finalized and enhanced further. The furnishings and finishes need to be completed and then maintained as well as possible. And finally, the art and objects, flowers and plants, and general accessorizing can be decided upon.

Perfect rooms are as irritating as perfect people. The ideal room is one that manages to look both interesting and relaxing; used but not abused. Upholstery should look neat and cushions should be plumped and well arranged. But at the same time the upholstery should look deeply comfortable and welcoming. If curtains are held back in tie-backs, these should be positioned at just the right height for the folds to look graceful. Blinds should be pulled up so that they are straight. Carpets, rugs, matting and hard flooring - all should look as clean as possible. Polished wood should be kept polished. Marble, glass and any metals should be free of spots.

Table tops, window sills, mantelpieces, display units and shelves should look best with some sense of arrangement. Plants, collections and art should be carefully chosen and should be arranged properly but should not look like they have been arranged in an artificial way, that one is nervous about putting down a glass for fear of spoiling an artistic effect.

Accessories

The decorative objects or the accessories are the crucial elements that can finish a scheme off perfectly. From handcrafted items and antiques to flowers and found objects, these are the decorative details that are often small in size but big in impact. In design term, they play a vital role in creating accents of colours, form and texture in a room. Whether displayed singly or in groups, they provide a focus for the eye and greatly enrich the entire scheme.

If lighting, colour scheme, window and floor treatments and the choice of furniture and upholstery are what makes a room comfortable, then the paintings and objects, plants, flowers and other embellishments are the elements that give it a special charm and make it memorable. They layer an interior scheme, thereby accentuating the colours, patterns, shapes and textures within the room.

There are two schools of thought on the display of objects: the school for simplicity and the school for clutter. The problem with the simple school is that the few objects used for display should be really beautiful or unusual, or at least made to appear so. The difficulty

about the 'cluttered' school is that the collections must be organized to display the possessions to their best advantage. This involves a careful assemblage of texture, shape and colour. Collections of small objects are far more effective when grouped together, rather than scattered thinly around the room. For example, very small objects like pebbles, shells or polished fragments of stones from the beach can be put into a bowl or goblets and displayed on window sills or shelves. Slightly larger objects can be grouped in a way, so that they have something in common, like colour, texture, shape or origin. Alternatively they can be juxtaposed with larger or smaller objects to create more interest and balance. You can add a plant or some dried flowers in a jar for contrast. If arrangements are grouped on a small table that is also used for books, magazines, glasses and so on, leave space so that the composition will not be ruined by putting down a tray, drink or book. If arrangements are placed on a glass table or shelf, you can light them from underneath with some up lighter to add charm. If they are not on a transparent surface, try lighting them with down lighters from above to add extra brilliance.

Some accessories are purely decorative, but others such as candlesticks and vases, have a functional role too. It is important when completing a room to be aware of this difference. Function must determine where something is placed, in terms of both height and location. Decide which of the items you want to be prominent and place them at key focal points in the room. Use other objects in a supporting role.

Purely decorative accessories are only worth including if you display them well. Location is important, especially the colour against which they are set, how they are lit and whether it is a single object that becomes a focal point or a group that needs to be carefully arranged for the maximum effect.

Displaying Pictures

The way the objects and pictures are displayed, play a crucial part in the success of a room. Consider pictures first. Do not dot these around a room, one on each wall, as this will only emphasize the spaces between them. Instead, group them together on one wall, even if it means leaving the other three bare. If these are the pictures of smaller subject matter, size and frame, accentuate this connection by making the arrangement symmetrical. For example six prints can be hung in two rows of three or in three rows of two. Such symmetrical arrangements are also possible with disparate images and sizes: a large picture could be placed centrally, with smaller size images flanking it on other side. Pictures that are double hung, one on top of the other, also look eye catching, particularly in rooms where they are often viewed from a sitting position such as dining or living rooms.

Images for the walls are not limited to drawings, prints and paintings. Also choose from posters, post cards, photographs and framed embroidery. A small piece of special fabric or hand printed wall paper also looks wonderful when framed.

Large single pictures look best hung over a mantelpiece or over a significant piece of furniture such as a sofa or side board, centred within its space. Make sure that the picture is no wider than the item it is being hung over, and beware of hanging it too low over a sofa.

Displaying other Works of Art

Wall Hangings

Fabric wall hangings are the ideal solution for covering large areas decoratively and they can hide a multitude of blemishes or eyesores on the wall too. Ethnic rugs make popular wall hangings. There is a vast range of materials to choose from to suit every style of room.

Mirrors

Mirrors are versatile. With an attractive wooden or gilded frame they are most decorative; they reflect light and help to create the illusion of more space. A large mirror placed at the end of a dark and narrow passage way opens up the area dramatically. In a small room a mirror, or mirrors, placed opposite a window, or windows, create a feeling of greater space and airiness; with pairs of windows a smaller mirror placed between them provides added dimension. A large mirror over a mantelpiece or bigger pieces of furniture, such as a sofa, provides a focal point in the room.

Displaying Collections

Whatever you choose to display, whether it is a prized china ornament, a pottery vase or a lovingly accumulated specialized collection, it is important that they are displayed to the greater advantage. To make the most of a thematic collection, anything from china and glassware to collectibles such as perfume bottles, always try to group them together, whether on a glass fronted cabinet, on wall mounted shelves or on a low table. Any arrangement looks better if the grouped items have a common factor, be it shape, colour or texture; otherwise the display will risk looking like clutter.



Unusual Collections

The collection of ordinary but unexpected objects often makes for a more memorable room than much rarer and more expensive items. Perhaps this is because one is less impressed by

the effect of something one knows to be especially good than that of something one has no idea about.

Sculpture

Sculpture always adds distinction to a room. Almost all sculpture looks better on some type of plinth, whether it is stone, wood, fibreglass, marble or plaster.

Screens

Screens are very adaptable, they may be used instead of drawn curtains at a window, can disguise an ugly or functional corner, and provide a decorative barrier behind which to store things or serve as a room divider.

Lighting

Although lighting has its role in terms of illumination, lights and lamps have a decorative role to play too. If you want a light for a room that is decorative as well as being functional, then decide how big it needs to be for its chosen location and purpose and how it might reflect the style of the room in terms of colour, shape and material. Generally, lamps and wall lights work well in pairs.

Table lamps come in different sizes and shapes. Think about the base first; should this be chosen to blend into the main colour scheme or should it be in accent colour? Should it be plain or patterned, high or low, slim or round? Lamp shades, too, come in a wide variety of colours, sizes, shapes and styles. They can also be decorated by stencilling motifs onto a card shade. A central ceiling pedant should never be the only source of lighting within a room. Remember, the more imposing the design will be, the more it will pull the light upwards.

Arranging Art

Unifying a set

A set of prints can be given a unity: it can be framed in the same material, whether, chrome, brass, gilding, silver or natural wood. Again an odd assortment of different subjects will have a unity of their own if they share a colour: all sepia tints or all black and white, or all green, ivory or terracotta



Hanging Heights

When there are lots of different things to hang, try not to hang them too high or too far apart. Do not fix anything so low that people knock their heads on it. Try to hang as much as possible at eye level. If there is a very large grouping, group at least the central pieces at eye level. If seating in the room consists of low-level couches or chairs, some pictures, prints or posters can be hung somewhat lower than usual.

There are certain guidelines to follow:

Most art work will stand out on dark walls although some drawings and graphic art can look good even on grey or neutral colours.

If the walls are strongly patterned, it is best to give prints and drawings very deep mounts, so that the subject is not lost in the surrounding background design.

Before hanging different sizes of pictures or other wall mounted objects that vary in size, shape and style, lay them out on the floor first and move them around until you find a composition that works best with other arrangements in the room and the wall space available.

Decide on the overall shape of the arrangement and mark out the area on the wall in pencil before you attempt to hang several things together. This will save a lot of unwanted nail holes.

Vertical arrangements of art make a room look taller.

Horizontal arrangements of art make a room look longer.

A lot of small works of art can be hung as a block to balance a large painting.



Alternative Art

There are plenty of alternatives to conventional art. Framed bits of fabric such as antique lace, square pieces of fabric pinned together like a patch work; interesting bed spreads, rugs, pieces of jewellery, old advertisements, and collections of post cards.

Suspend heavy fabrics on a slim curtain rod hung on hooks. Unless the fabric is very rare, turn over the top to make the casing for the rod.

Frame lighter fabrics underneath perspex or glass or stretch them like canvas over thin wood frames.

Hang smaller items on top of a square of velvet or canvas and then stretch on a frame.

Flowers and Plants

There is almost no gap in a room which a plant cannot fill and no piece of furniture that cannot be balanced and made to look better by a spread of leaves, no corner that is not softened by foliage.

Light and Aspect

The choice of plant is governed by the amount of light a room receives and its aspect (the direction in which the windows face). If the aspect and light both are not right for the plant, the plant cannot survive.

Using Plants Creatively

Plants can be put in anything such as a basket, terracotta pot, or stainless steel planter; it all depends on what best suits the mood of the room. Plants can be grouped with sculpture. Tall plants and indoor trees make subtle room dividers. A bushy indoor tree or a well plated hanging basket set in front of an uncertain window can make it look completely dressed.

Lighting Plants

Use up lights behind plants to throw dramatic shadows onto walls and ceilings, as well as illuminating the foliage on a dull day or at night; or plants can be put under the down light.

Decorating With Fresh Flowers

Cut flowers and container plants offer the perfect way of introducing nature into a room. Their vivid colours, bold shapes, textural leaves and delicious scents will all lift a scheme. The colours of the plants should complement the colours of the room. Bold displays of flowers or plants suit the areas like living rooms or hall ways but for the bedroom something less intrusive seems more suitable.



Decorating with Dried Flowers

Dried flowers, leaves and berries can be used to make flower arrangements large and small, as well as wreaths, garlands and even dried trees. Dried florist's foam or crumpled chicken wire is used to hold everything in place. Most plant materials can be dried by hanging in small bunches in any dry and airy place.



Suggested Further Reading:

- ✓ *Finishing Touch: Details that Make a Room Beautiful, (2009), By Carol Spier*
- ✓ *Arts & Crafts Homes and the Revival, (2011), By Douglas Keister*