

Arranging your furniture



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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Furniture arrangement is the bringing together of your family's activities, the structural features of your house, and your furnishings. One of the main concerns of every family is to achieve comfort. Your family is, no doubt, interested in convenience, safety, and beauty, also.

Do you have to move a chair each time you watch TV? When the guests leave, do you have to rearrange the living room because the furniture is "out of place"? Chances are if this happens you haven't really thought through how the room is used and who uses it.

The arrangement of furniture in the living area of the home needs to be flexible. Most living areas serve several purposes—sometimes simultaneously. Often a single piece of furniture is designed to serve more than one purpose, but usually not at the same time, however. Your family needs to be able to participate in as many activities within a given area as possible without major changes in the arrangement of the furnishings.

The comfort and well-being of your family can be best served by making home a pleasant, welcoming place to be, with the furnishings you need at hand. Every family differs in work habits, hobbies, and interests. For this reason, no two families will come up with exactly the same arrangement that works best for them.

Consider Your Family's Activities

Look at your family and consider what its members do at home. Does Dad need a quiet place where he can work at night? Does anyone in the family play a musical instrument? Do teenagers want a place for dancing? Does Mom need space and adequate light for sewing? Does your family play card games frequently? Are there young children who need a play area? Do you need space for community meetings for young people or adults? Is your living room also used for an occasional overnight guest? Do you have a combination living-dining room? As you answer these questions, you'll find that your answers should influence the way your furniture is arranged.

Some activities are common to most families. A major conversation area is needed in most homes. This may be found in the living room or family room, or in both places. The same area frequently serves at other times as a multi-purpose center for music, television viewing, reading, group games, informal meals, or the like. Seating needs to be provided so that people face each other.

Dining space may be provided for in one or more places in the home, depending on your family's eating and entertaining habits. This may be in a separate dining room, kitchen, breakfast room, or combination living-dining room. Adequate space for tables, chairs, and people should be allowed for your family, plus guests.

Sleeping and dressing are two major activities which families need to consider when arranging the furniture in a bedroom. Studying, sewing, and reading may also take place here, depending on the available space.

How To Begin

Before you push furniture around or go out and buy a new piece, it would be well to have your family consider together the activities that normally take place in this area. These could be classified into frequent and occasional activities. Consider any special problems such as the amount of space and/or noise a particular activity will require.

Have the whole family help to list the activities. This way you won't forget any. Beside each activity, list the furniture that it will require and the space needed for the furniture and its use. Here's an example.

ACTIVITY	FURNITURE	SPACE REQUIRED
Reading	Chair	30" wide - 34" deep
	Table	18" wide - 24" deep
	Lamp	
	Footstool	28" wide - 18" deep
Conversation	Clearance for feet between Chair and footstool	12" x 18"

FIGURE 1

The possession of a piece of furniture that will fit in only one place in your house should be considered before you go very far with your plan.

Paper sofas and pianos are much easier to move and don't cause wear and tear on nerves, muscles, and furniture.

the way real ones do. It is easier to begin your furniture arrangement with a pencil, ruler, and some graph paper.

Using one-quarter-inch graph paper, draw your room to scale accurately. Let each square on the paper represent one foot. Show all of the jogs in the room, the electrical outlets, heating units, built-in furniture or storage, location of doors and windows, and the direction which doors swing.

Your next step will be to make cut-outs of your furniture. Measure and draw to the same scale as the floor plan (one-quarter inch equals one foot) the furniture which you now have. Label each piece as you draw it. If the furniture can be drawn on a different color of paper, it is easier to see your arrangement begin to take shape.

As you begin to place the paper furniture on the floor plan, you will need to consider traffic paths in the room, desirable clearances for convenient use of furniture, as well as some guides for achieving good design.

If you work your plan out on paper prior to any physical moving, you can save a great deal of physical labor and frustration, to say nothing of the wear and tear on the furniture. Planning the arrangement can be a good family project. Each family member will then feel that he has shared in the new arrangement. This could encourage cooperation of family members in helping to keep the room orderly.

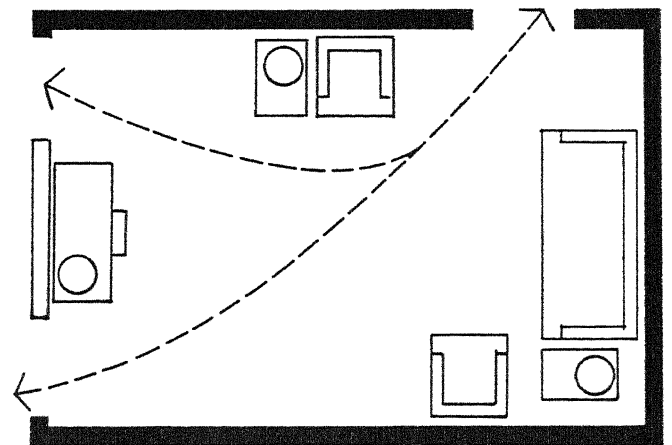
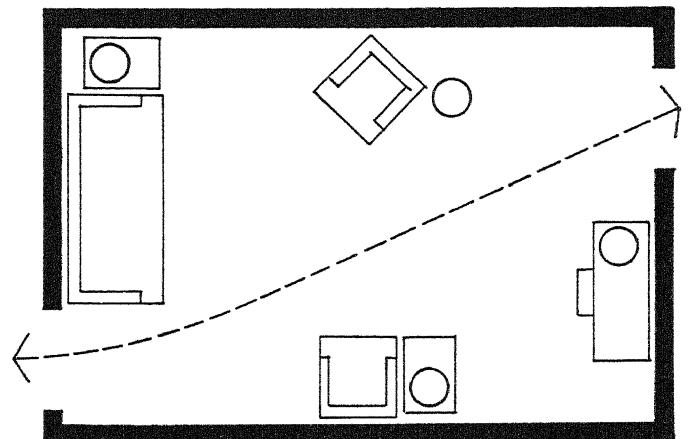
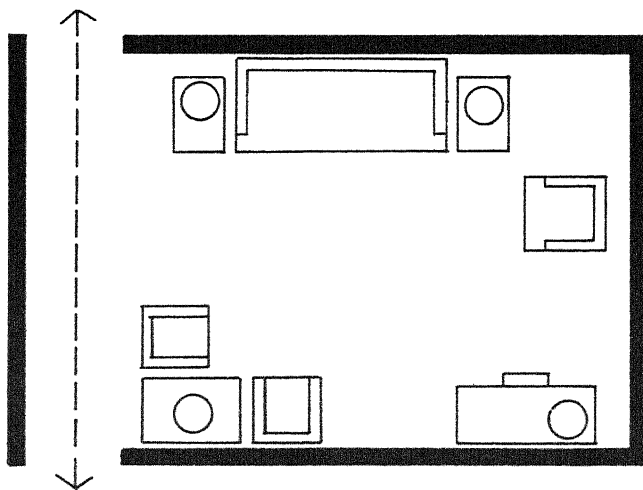
SOME GUIDES TO FOLLOW WHEN ARRANGING FURNITURE

Establish Traffic Paths

Traffic paths are necessary in every room. Properly located entrances to a room should hold the number and length of the paths to a minimum. More satisfactory furniture arrangements can be arrived at if major traffic paths cross only the side or end of the room. You should strive to keep major traffic from passing through a conversation area.

When halls are omitted from a house plan, some part of each room in the house becomes a hallway. This part of the room cannot be used for furniture except for occasional small scale chests, tables or the like, if there is adequate space.

Take a look at the openings in your room and where they lead. Remember that people usually take the shortest route between two points. In your case, does this mean that traffic passes through the center of the room?



FIGURES 2, 3 and 4 show traffic lanes in rooms of the same size and shape but with different door locations. Broken lines indicate traffic lanes. Figure 2 confines traffic to one end of the room with the rest of the room left for convenient furniture arrangement. In Figure 3, the traffic pattern divides the room into two equal parts. Note that fewer pieces of furniture can be used and the conversation area is broken. Figure 4 shows even more floor space being used for traffic, when a third door is added to the room. The conversation area is divided by the traffic, and fewer pieces of furniture can be used than in Figure 2.

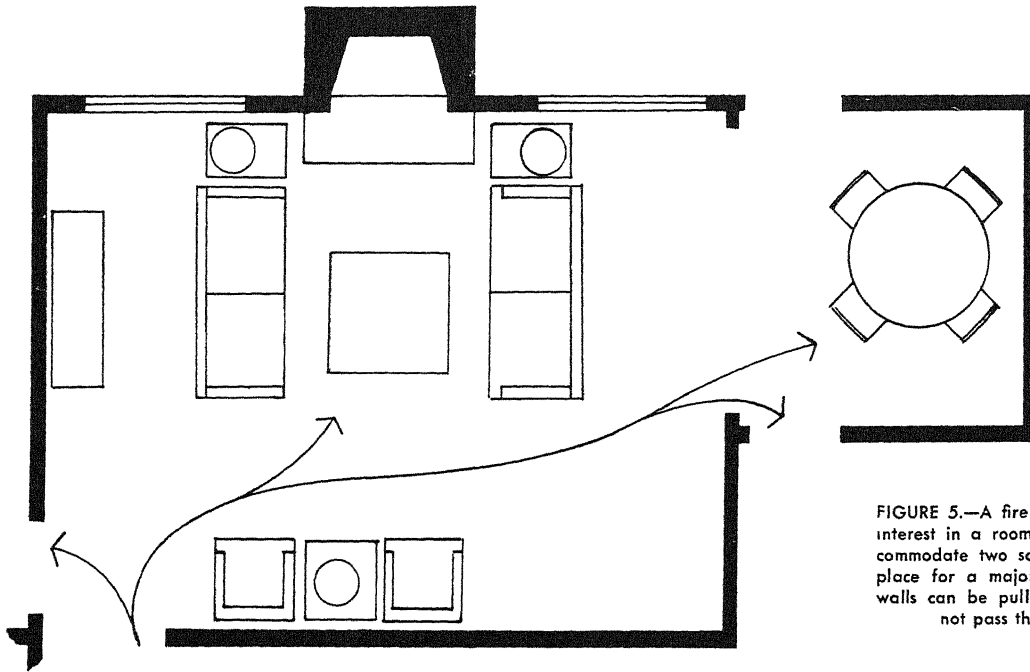


FIGURE 5.—A fireplace is often the natural center of interest in a room. This room is large enough to accommodate two sofas set at right angles to the fireplace for a major conversation group. Chairs along walls can be pulled over when needed. Traffic does not pass through the conversation area.

Leave traffic paths free from furniture and wide enough to walk through easily. Make the route as direct as possible between the entrance and the activity normally participated in first. If it is a passageway to another room, allow a direct, "free-from-furniture" route. Try to arrange conversation areas so that traffic passes around them. It is sometimes desirable to reroute traffic. In this case, furniture may be used to define the new route. This should be done with large pieces of furniture. Small pieces may cause a safety hazard.

Allow ample space within the room between groupings of furniture to permit people to move easily. These traffic lanes would be considered minor traffic paths. Define these as clearly as possible with furniture so that guests won't have to wonder about the best way to get there.

Allow Space for People

For the comfort and convenience of your family, don't overcrowd the room. If adequate space has been allowed, the room will be easier to use and to clean. There will be a minimum amount of moving furniture to fit the activity.

Some of the more common clearances which one needs to allow for include:

- Traffic path, major 4' to 6'
- Traffic path, minor 1'4" to 4'
- Foot room between sofa or chair and edge of coffee table top 1'
- Floor space in front of chair or sofa for feet and legs 1'6" to 2'6"
- Chair or bench space in front of desk or piano 3'

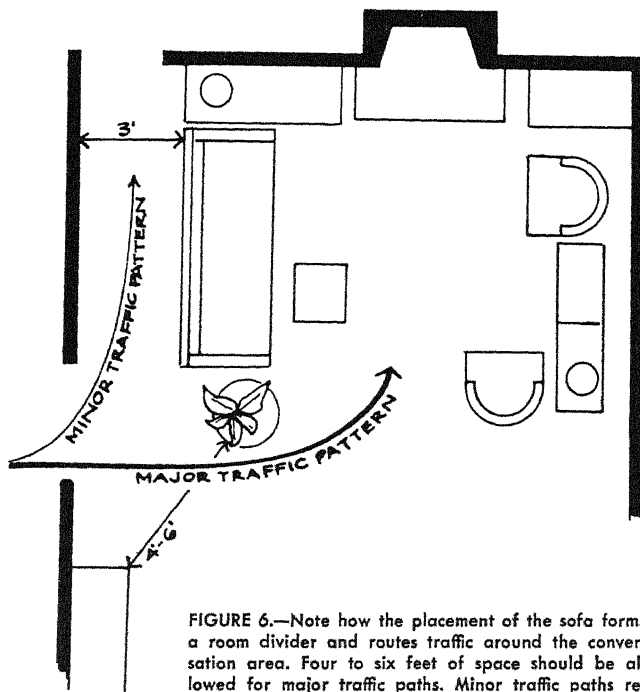


FIGURE 6.—Note how the placement of the sofa forms a room divider and routes traffic around the conversation area. Four to six feet of space should be allowed for major traffic paths. Minor traffic paths require one foot four inches to four feet. Large pieces of furniture should follow the structural lines of the room (parallel to or at right angles to the wall).

Dining Room

- Space for occupied chairs 1'6" to 1'10"
- Space to get into chair (edge of table to nearest wall or piece of furniture) 2' to 2'6"
- Traffic path around table and occupied chairs for serving 2'6" to 3'

Bedroom

- Space for making bed 1'6" to 2'
- Space between twin beds 1'6" to 2'4"
- Space in front of chest of drawers 3'
- Space for dressing 3' to 4' (in both directions)

Group Furniture According to Activities

Grouping furniture according to activities makes the arrangement serve the people who live there. All of the furniture and accessories needed for an activity should be grouped as close together as is sensible. (Note clearances on page 4.) For example, if reading is the activity, a comfortable chair, a good reading lamp, table, books, magazine or paper, and possibly a footstool, are essential. Since in most cases more than one activity takes place in a room at any one time, the grouping of furniture for reading should be as far away from a noisy activity as possible.

Some activities require furniture, lighting, and accessories for several people at once. The major conversation area is an example. It often serves at other times as family multi-purpose group center for music, television viewing, casual reading, and buffet meals. The furniture should be placed so that people face each other and can also easily see the musical instrument or television.

Almost every room can serve more than one purpose. Activities may be separated by the use of dividers or screens.

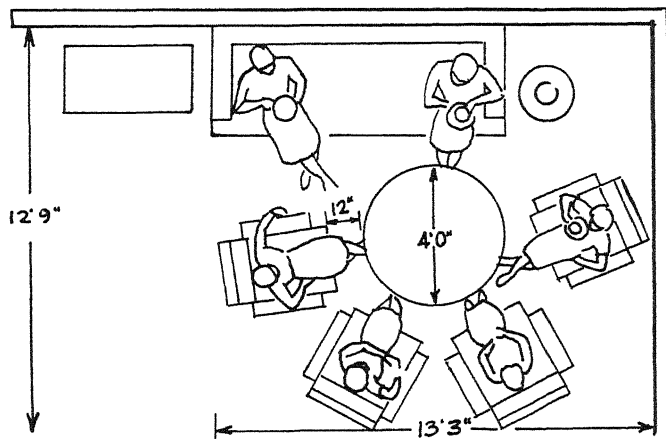


FIGURE 7.—Major conversation groups are most satisfactory when they are more or less circular in shape and when the longest distance between the heads of people is 8 to 10 feet. Remember to allow 12 inches between the front edge of a chair and the edge of a coffee table for a person's feet and legs.

If you want to see across the room, a low bookcase, table, or any free standing piece of furniture (one finished on the back) may serve as a divider. Just a simple change of colors or the use of area rugs can define specific activity areas.

Follow Structural Lines of the Room

Major pieces of furniture such as sofas, beds, dressers, pianos, and buffets should be arranged in such a way that they seldom have to be moved. This saves energy, time, and wear and tear on both the person and furniture. In order to give maximum space in the room, align major pieces with the wall. This may be parallel to the wall or at right angles. Avoid the waste of space and visual confusion that comes to the room with large pieces placed at angles or across corners.

Create a Feeling of Spaciousness

Make your room seem as spacious as possible first by following the structural lines of the room (placing large pieces parallel or at right angles to the wall) and, second, by getting rid of unused furniture. As each activity is considered and the furniture selected for that activity, if there are pieces of furniture which no longer have a purpose in your room, don't honor them with valuable space. Allow as much uncluttered space as possible so that you do not fill your room to capacity before the people get in.

Develop Rhythm by Placement

Do you ever wonder why one room welcomes you, makes you feel comfortable, while another gives you the jitters? Part of the answer lies in the nature of the human eye. Any movement other than straight forward or from side to side creates extra work for your eye. Horizontal lines in a room are pleasing and easy on your eyes. Horizontal objects may be a table, sofa, low chest, or chair. The pattern or textures in upholstery, slip cover, or drapery fabrics may also help maintain a horizontal feeling in the room.

Vertical lines attract attention, causing your eye to move up and down. In our homes, high chests, tall bookcases, tall slender chairs, tall lamps, and poster beds are a few of the eye catchers that attract attention and cause the eye to move vertically.

A helter-skelter placement of horizontal and vertical objects in a room makes the eye go up and down, then side to side, creating an atmosphere of uneasiness and restlessness. "Busy" is another word for this feeling.

One of the first considerations is to decide that there is to be one major point of interest and one or two less important points in the room. We sometimes refer to the major focal point as a center of interest. Vertical objects or groupings in these points of interest need to be tied together with the horizontal objects in the room by means of accessories, such as lamps, pictures, planters, sculpture. The furniture and accessories should be placed in such a way as to lead the eye up, down, and around the room.

It is this smooth transition from one vertical object or group to another that gracefully creates rhythm in a room.

Relate Scale

One of the requirements of good design in a room is the selection of furnishings on a scale suitable to the room and to other furnishings. Generally, large, bulky furniture and large patterns look best in a large room. Small, slim-line furniture and small patterns usually belong in a smaller room. You should consider not only the physical space that a piece of furniture will occupy in a room, but the visual space as well. Does it look as though all the space is filled with furniture?

It is not necessary to match all the furniture, but it is highly desirable to relate the scale of the furniture, espe-

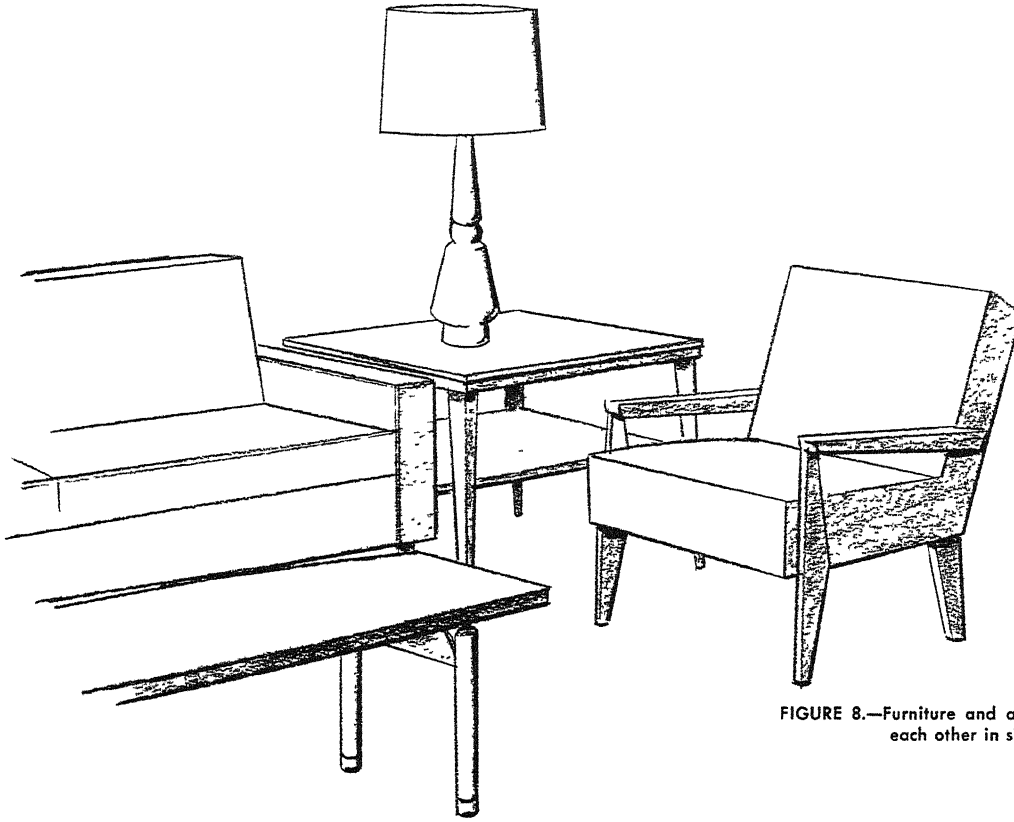


FIGURE 8.—Furniture and accessories should relate to each other in size and scale.

cially those pieces side by side. A large heavy lamp can overpower a delicate table. The lamp appears larger and the table more fragile when placed together. See Figure 8 for a good example of relating the scale of two pieces of furniture to each other. Another reason for relating the scale of two pieces of furniture is for comfort and convenience. It is much easier not to reach up or down for items on the table. It is well to select the chair and table before selecting a lamp. The height of the table will determine the height lamp one needs to spread light on the lap but not in the eyes of the person using it.

Gain a Sense of Balance

Balance should be so natural in a room that you are unaware of it when it is present. It is only when balance is absent that you should feel a sense of discomfort or annoyance. Balance is gained by a sensitive distribution of visual weights in a room. It is important not to have every item that compels your attention in the same part of the room. Equally as important is to avoid having each part exactly equal in weight. The visual weight depends on the physical size of the object, its scale, and color.

Balance may be formal or informal. Formal balance is achieved when two objects of equal visual weight are placed the same distance from a center point. Identical lamps or identical tables at either end of a sofa or identical chairs on either side of a chest or table are illustrations of formal balance. Informal balance is reached when objects

of unequal size or visual weight are brought together around a central point. A sofa with a table and lamp at one end and a picture over the sofa at the opposite end is an example of informal balance. See Figure 10 for an example of informal balance in which accessories help to give visual balance to the arrangement. In a room, it is wise to use both types of balance to achieve interest and variety.

Establish Center of Interest

To make a room attractive, you should “play up” one feature of the room or grouping of furniture and accessories. It may be a fireplace, the view from a large window area, or a single important picture that you would choose as the center of interest. If it should be the view from a large window area, be sure that glare won’t make this uncomfortable to look at as you sit in the room. Outdoor lighting can make this center of interest as exciting at night as in daylight.

As you consider arranging the furniture so that everyone has a view of the center of interest, you immediately wonder how the television fits into this plan. If the television is to be in the main family living area, it too should be placed so that major seating pieces of furniture face it. If possible, the set should be placed so that it does not face a window. It is sometimes possible to place it beside a fireplace or window area. The set could be built into a storage or bookcase wall or be placed on casters so that

it turns easily to face more than one seating area. Standing alone, a television does not usually make a very exciting center of interest for a room.

People Are More Important Than Furniture

It is important to make any furniture arrangement work for you. Arrange your furniture to fit your family's way of living. Don't hesitate to use others' ideas if they seem to work for you. On the other hand, don't copy an idea just because it looks good in a magazine, store, or someone else's home. Change the arrangement when your needs change or when you think you have worked out a better plan. If you work with a floor plan and furniture cut-outs, the trial of new ideas can be fun without physical labor. A good plan for the arrangement of your furniture is one that will wear well and that you and your family won't tire of readily.

Arranging furniture can be challenging and enjoyable if you will try different combinations until you find one that seems to be just right for your home. As new situations arise, as your family changes or as you add or subtract furnishings, don't hesitate to try a new arrangement.

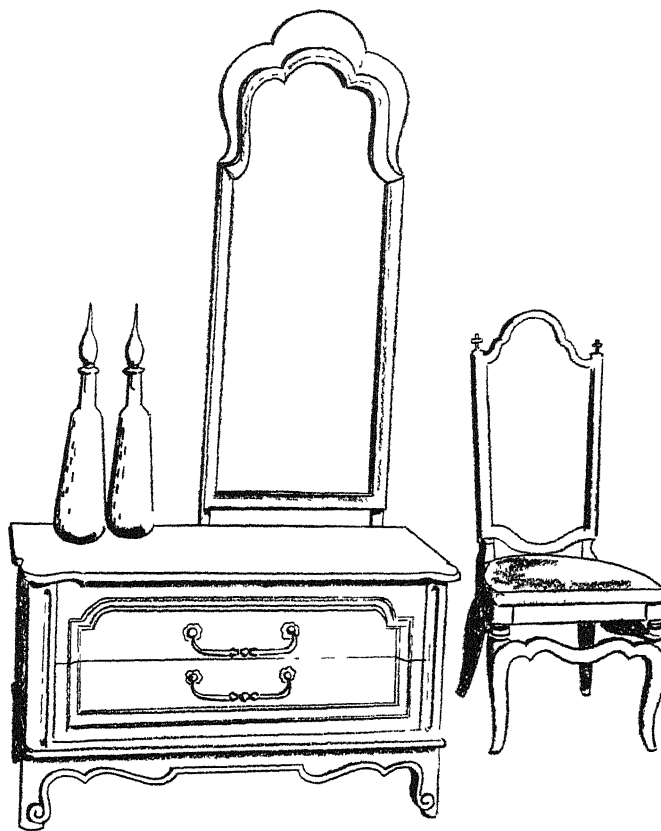


FIGURE 10.—Informal balance in furniture arrangement.

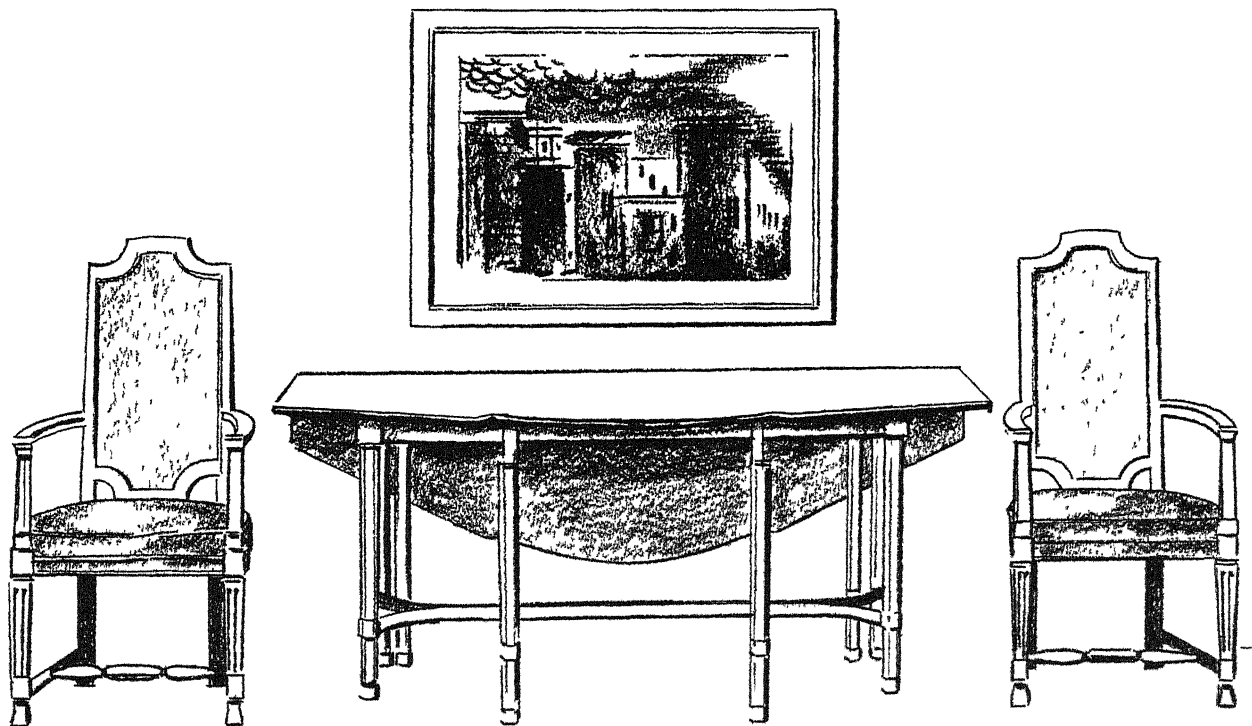


FIGURE 9.—Formal balance in furniture arrangement.

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