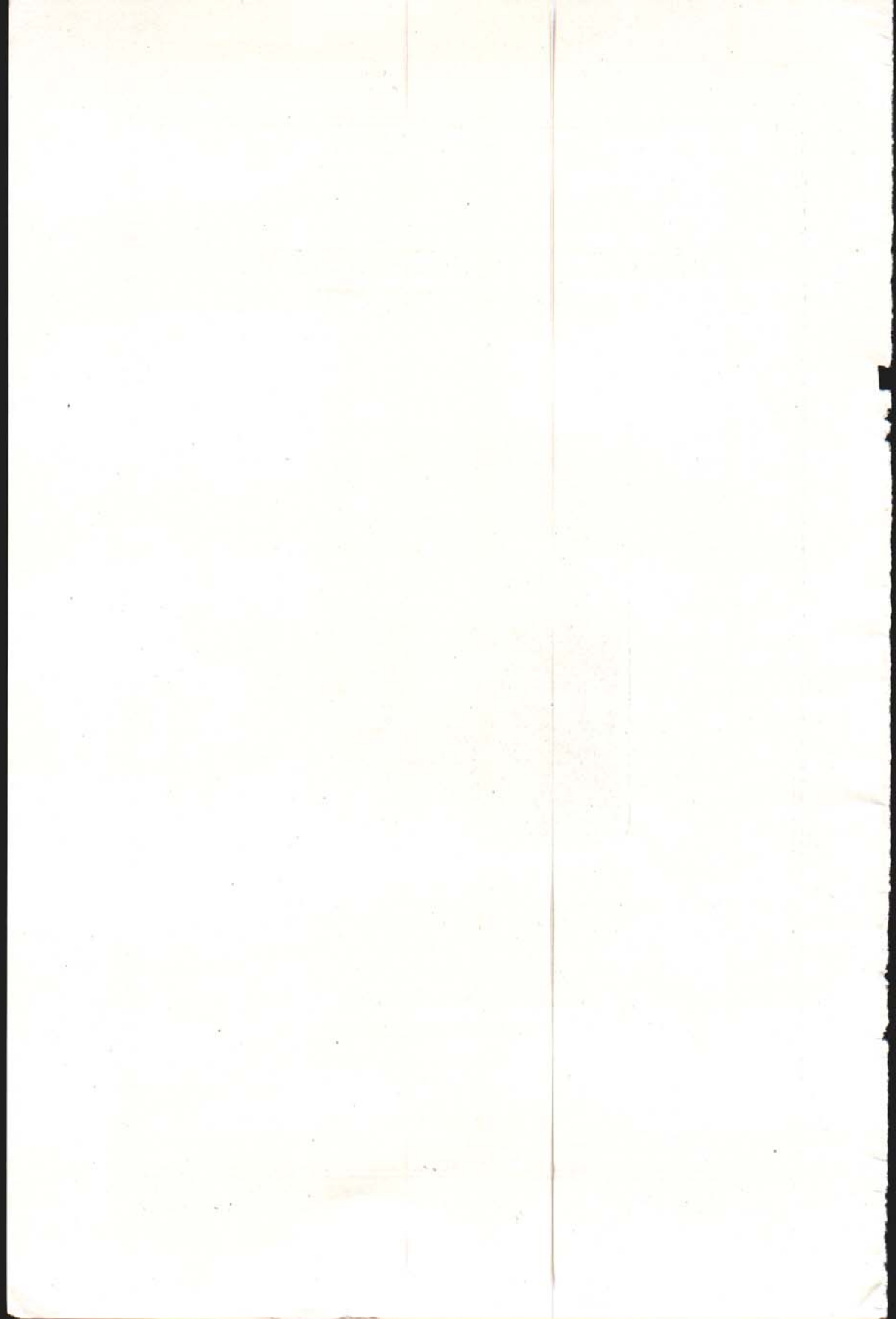


## BEAUTY IN FURNITURE ARRANGEMENT



MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE  
OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

EXTENSION SERVICE  
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# BEAUTY IN FURNITURE ARRANGEMENT

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*"The beauty of the house is order;  
The glory of the house is hospitality."*

*"Have nothing in your houses that you do  
not know to be useful, or believe to be  
beautiful."—William Morris.*

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## THE MEANING OF DESIGN

No one problem, with which the homemaker has to deal, has more effect on the beauty of the home than the arrangement of the furnishings. Choice and arrangement of line, form, dark and light, and color to give order and beauty is design. So often design is thought of as something about which only the artist needs to know, yet we encounter it and use it in everyday life. The homemaker decidedly needs to understand the underlying principles of design because every room in her home is a design, either good or poor.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD DESIGN

A good design will have good proportion, unity, simplicity, and structural decoration. If nothing can be added nor taken away without marring the effect, the room is a good design.

**Good proportion** is a pleasing relationship of spaces. If the furniture is to be arranged so that there is a pleasing relationship of spaces, the room itself should be of nice proportions. The Greeks excelled in creating pleasing proportions. It is found that their "Golden Oblong," the plan which they used to break spaces, measured approximately two units by three units. If the room takes its shape from these proportions, and the height of the ceiling is related to the size of the room, it will not only be pleasing in proportion but also of a shape in which it is easy to arrange the furniture attractively. If a room is square or long and very narrow the proportions are uninteresting.

To get a feeling of good proportion throughout the room it is important that the divisions in the wall spaces and that the spaces formed by the grouping of objects be interesting. Too many equal spaces produce monotony. If a space is to be divided into two parts by a small object, interesting proportions will be gained when the object is



placed at a point a little more than one-half and a little less than two-thirds the distance from one of the ends.

If there are more than two divisions, pleasing proportions may be obtained by having all the divisions unequal. This cannot be carried to the extreme because it might produce confusion if there are many divisions. Sometimes a variation in some of the spaces and repetition in others will give interesting proportions when more than two divisions are desired. For example, if a wall space is to be broken up by a piano and two chairs, which are alike in appearance, the piano would be placed in the center of the space and would therefore break the space equally. Then the chair on either side of the piano could be placed so



Figure I.—Furniture is placed to give both equal and unequal wall spaces. There is variety in the height of the objects.

that it broke its space unequally. The furniture in Figure I breaks the wall spaces into pleasing proportions.

The height of the objects and their contour should be considered when arranging any group because if they are all alike the result will be monotonous. See Figures I and II. The arrangement of odd numbers of objects usually gives a more interesting arrangement than of even numbers.

Whenever objects are to be noticed as units they should be separated by spaces wider than the objects. If they are to be seen as a group the spaces between them should be smaller than they are.

*The proportions of a room can be apparently altered. "Vertical movement" makes an object look taller and more slender, and a horizontal movement has the opposite effect.\**

\*From—"Art in Every Day Life," by Goldstein.

If the ceiling is too high or too low to give nice proportions to a room, the mistake may be somewhat corrected by choosing the right wallpaper and window treatment. See footnote.

Pictures and accessories may be placed to emphasize the height or width in a room. The height of the room is emphasized in the picture on the cover page. A room which is too long will appear to be shorter if the important groups of furniture are placed in the center of the



Figure II.—Objects that are the same in height do not break the wall space into pleasing proportions. The placing of the candlesticks and candles illustrates formal balance.

room. The placing of two rugs running across the room, rather than one large one will decrease the length in appearance. This will increase the apparent width of the room. The placing of a long, low piece of furniture across each end of the room will also seem to add to the width. See Figure III.

The furniture should be in *scale* with the room. If good proportion is to be felt throughout the room there must be consistent relationship of sizes. There should be a pleasing relationship between the size of the different pieces of furniture and the size of the room. For instance, large, overstuffed pieces of furniture will seem to crowd a small room while too small and too delicate furniture will be lost in a large room. Pieces about the same in scale should be arranged together. A large piece of furniture may be balanced with a group of smaller pieces. If a room is too small for the furniture then the

Note: A more complete discussion of this will be found in Michigan State College Home Economics Extension Course Notes, "The Background of the Room" and "Window Treatment."



fewest possible number of pieces should be used. The furniture in Figure I is in scale with the room.

**Unity** in a room is that quality of oneness which seems to hold the parts and furnishings of the room together. Unity is gained by selecting and arranging consistent objects and ideas. If the room has unity it will give a complete picture at first glance. The eye will first see the most important idea in the room and then will be carried to the details in the order of their importance. However, one should not be immediately conscious of any one object, either drapery or furniture—all should belong together. Sometimes the eye is carried from one object to another by repeating the lines of the furniture in the drapery

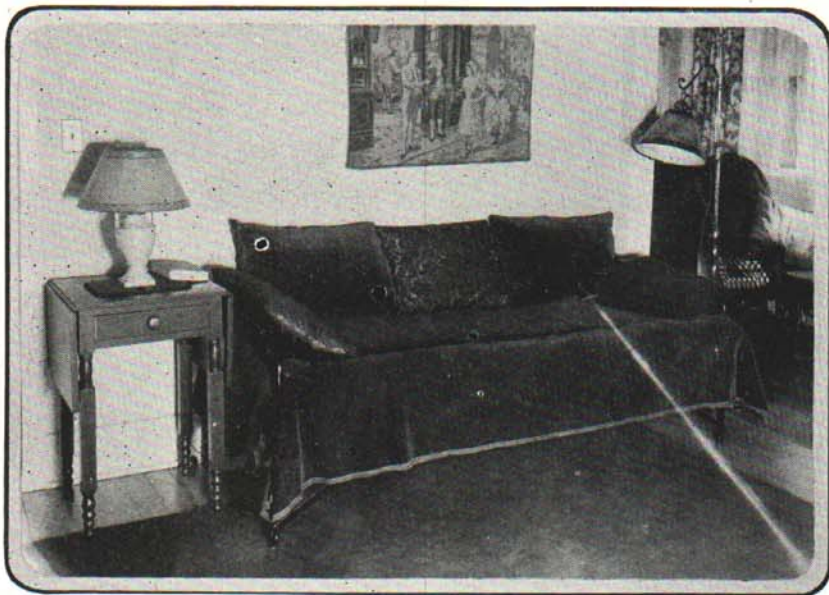


Figure III.—The width of the room is emphasized by the arrangement of furniture and accessories.

or by repeating the coloring or textures throughout the room. Unity gives a feeling of restfulness.

To secure unity in a room, center of interest, balance and rhythm must be considered.

To have unity there must be a **center of interest**. The center of interest should give the keynote of the purpose of the room; for instance, in a living room the group that is the center of interest will speak of restfulness and sociability. The object, or group of objects, chosen for the center of interest should be the most interesting in the room. The center of interest might be a group of windows, a window with book shelves on either side, a window with a beautiful scene, a fireplace or a reading table. The center of interest in figure I is the reading group over which hangs the mirror.

After the center of interest in the room has been decided upon there should be subordination of all other parts of the room to it.

To have unity, a feeling of restfulness and repose, there must be **balance**. The success of the room as a good design depends a great deal upon balance. If a room is not balanced there is a sense of confusion. Balance is obtained by grouping colors and shapes around centers so that there will be equal attraction on each side of the centers. Objects in art are balanced, not by their weight, but by the amount of attention they attract. A room is in balance when there is an equalization between attractions of the furnishings.

There are two kinds of balance, both of which are applied in the arrangement of home furnishings; they are: formal and informal.

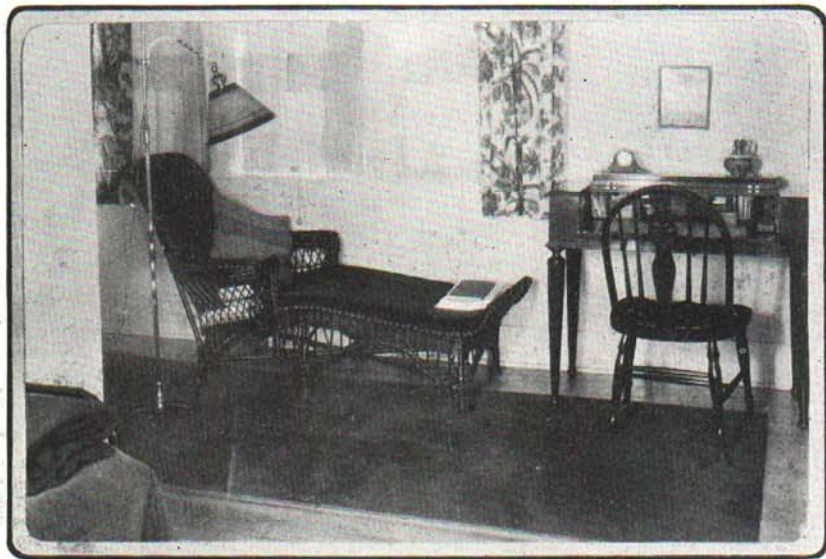


Figure IV.—Informal balance is used to balance the vase and clock on the desk.

If two objects are the same size and are alike, or if they have the same power of attraction they can be placed at equal distances from the center. This is **formal balance** or **symmetry**. If too much formal balance is used it is apt to give a feeling of severity to the room. Formal balance is a mechanical arrangement. It is used a great deal in the arrangement of the furniture in the dining room, and the arrangement of accessories on mantels and shelves. It gives dignity to a room. The candles and the candlesticks in Figure II are balanced formally.

**Informal or occult** balance is used when objects differ in size, color or shape so that they do not attract the same attention. Informal balance is more subtle than formal balance yet it has a charm and is restful. In order to balance objects of different attraction the brighter and larger one is moved nearer the center while the smaller and less conspicuous one is moved farther from the center. The objects are



always at unequal distances from the center in informal balance yet they are so placed that they give a feeling of being equal in weight and value. Informal balance is used to balance the clock and vase on the desk in Figure IV. Notice that the vase attracts the greater amount of attention and is therefore placed nearer the picture.

The fixed decorations, such as doors, windows, fireplaces and built-in furniture are usually balanced formally; however, if they are not, then balance must be obtained by the furnishings to give a sense of equilibrium to the room. For instance, if a window is not placed in the center of the wall a group of furnishings should be placed on the other side of the center which will give a sense of weight equal to that of



Figure V.—Too abrupt lines are formed to give a feeling of rhythm.

the window. Or, where there is no opening opposite a fireplace, the fireplace could be balanced by hanging a large piece of tapestry or rug on the opposite wall. There will be a feeling of equilibrium in the room if the opposite ends and sides balance.

If the room is to have unity the objects must be arranged so that they express a feeling of **rhythm**. ". . . Rhythm means an easy, connected path along which the eye may travel in any arrangement of lines, color or lights and darks. Rhythm, then, is related movement."\* The rhythmic lines of the arrangement will help emphasize the center of interest.

Rhythm may be obtained "through repetition of shapes, through progression of sizes and through an easily connected, or a continuous line movement."\* The furnishings should be so arranged that it is

\*From—"Art in Every Day Life," by Goldstein.



easy for the eye to be carried along each piece to the center of interest. If spaces between objects are too great there is a lack of rhythm. There must be some repetition of shapes, lines, textures and colors if there is to be unity. If there is no repetition there is confusion in the room. However, there is danger of monotony if no variety is introduced.

When obtaining rhythm through progression of sizes the movement should not be too rapid or form too abrupt lines. The picture on the cover page has a great deal of rhythm in its arrangement. Notice the gradual progression of sizes. There is not as much rhythm in arrangement of furniture in Figure V. If a small lamp was placed on the table and the bridge lamp removed there would be better feeling of rhythm.

There must be **simplicity** in arrangement. A beautiful design is usually a simple one; therefore, if the room is to be a good design it must be simply arranged. Overcrowding a room destroys the beauty of it while a few things artistically arranged give a feeling of restfulness and dignity. The elimination of all superfluous features do more to add beauty to a room than any one other thing. Souvenirs, trinkets and kewpie dolls surely cheapen the effect and lessen the dignity of a room intended for general use. However, family photographs may be placed in the bedroom.

Simplicity cannot be over-emphasized in either the arrangement of the large pieces of furniture or the small accessories. A few well-chosen accessories, interesting in shape, coloring and character, which harmonize with the other objects of the room, carefully arranged give an artistic touch to a room whereas too many accessories spoil the beauty in the other furnishings.

Simplicity, however, should not be carried to the extreme because the result will be plainness. Simplicity in arrangement is simply selecting the necessary articles and arranging them in an orderly, yet interesting way, so that they will give the impression of directness. Its use in arrangement will not make the room a commonplace one; individuality can even better be expressed by its use. Any of the illustrations in this bulletin show simplicity in arrangement.

A design to be good should have **structural decoration**, that is the decoration should follow or be in harmony with the structural lines of the design.

Since the arrangement of the furnishings makes a design of the room then the large pieces of furniture must follow the structural lines of the room. The rugs, scarfs and table covers should also run parallel with the lines of the room. When this rule is followed the room appears more spacious and restful.

Rugs askew and large pieces of furniture across the corners or at angles to the wall give a sense of confusion and disorder to the room. Only the small objects, such as the chairs may vary from the lines of the room. Notice in the picture on the cover page that the table and the cover on the table are placed so they follow the lines of the room while the chair is placed at a slight angle. The desk in Figure II, the couch in Figure III and the chaise lounge in Figure IV show large pieces of furniture following the structural lines of the room.

### HOMELIKE EFFECT

Rooms should have a homelike appearance. Convenience, comfort, and simplicity help to give a liveable appearance to rooms. The convenience of arrangement depends a great deal on the grouping of the furniture.

Furniture should be so arranged that convenient groups are formed according to their uses. The elements of beauty and convenience are so friendly that usually if a group of articles is arranged in the most attractive way it will be also arranged in the most convenient way. A group of furniture should be planned for every use of the room. For instance, in the living room there needs to be a writing group, a reading group, and, if the family is musical, a music group.

It will be best to have the writing group away from the visiting group if possible and in a place where there is good light. Figure IV shows a good writing group. It is away from the visiting group and has plenty of light.

Comfortable chairs, convenient books or magazines on a table, shelf or in a book rack, and a well placed lamp usually make the reading group. The chairs should be placed so that there is good light for day reading as well as for evening use. Figures I and IV show good reading groups.

If there is a music group it should be away from the visiting and writing groups if possible.

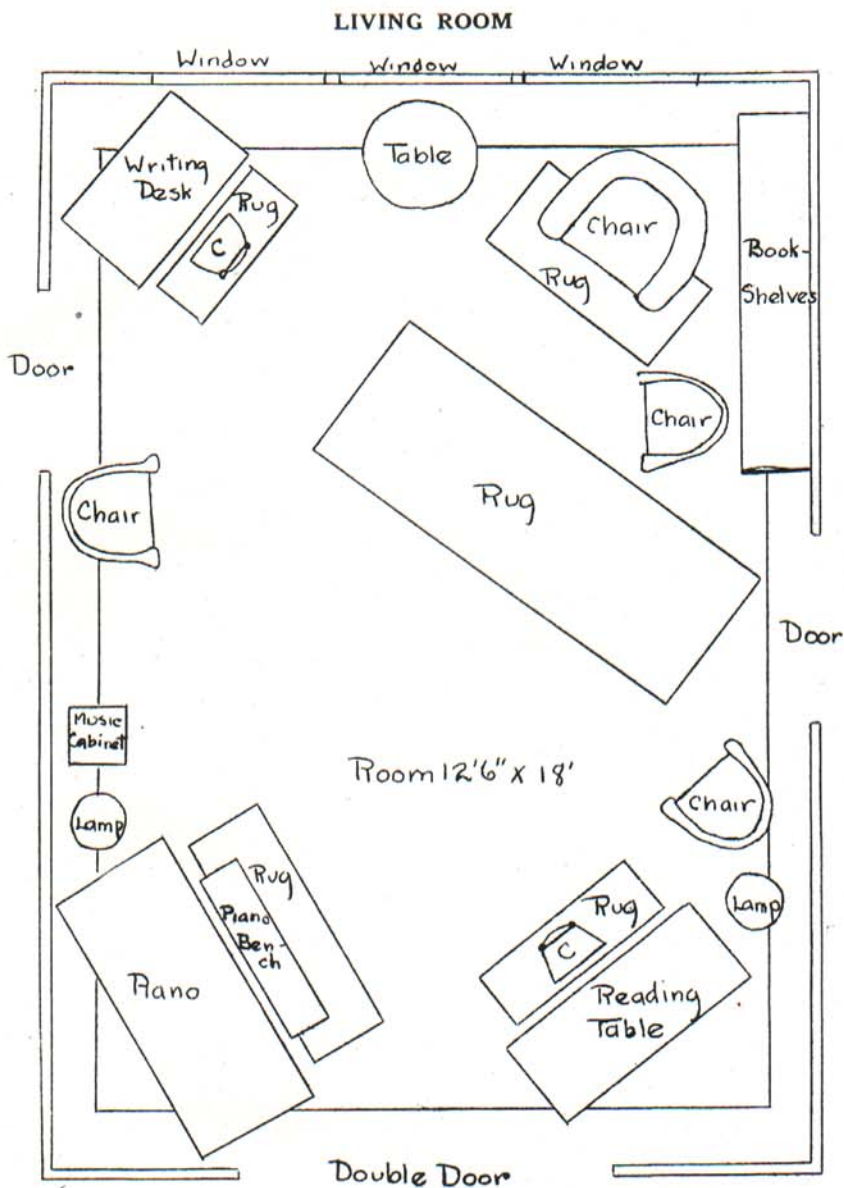
The visiting group will need a thoughtful placing of chairs. Figures I and III show possible visiting groups. So often the fireplace is the center of interest, not only for the entire room but also for the visiting group. If there is a davenport it then plays an important part. If the room is large and the fireplace is at the end of the room the davenport may be placed in front of it and straight with the wall. Oftentimes a table is placed behind the davenport. This arrangement somewhat shuts the fireplace off from the rest of the room. If the room is small or square or if the fireplace is in the center of a side wall the above arrangement should not be used because the davenport will come too near the center of the room. It is then best to place it along the wall.

In the bedroom the bed and a small table and lamp may form one group while the dresser, chairs and closet another. The bed should be placed parallel with the wall, where there is good air for the sleeper and where the early morning sun does not fall.

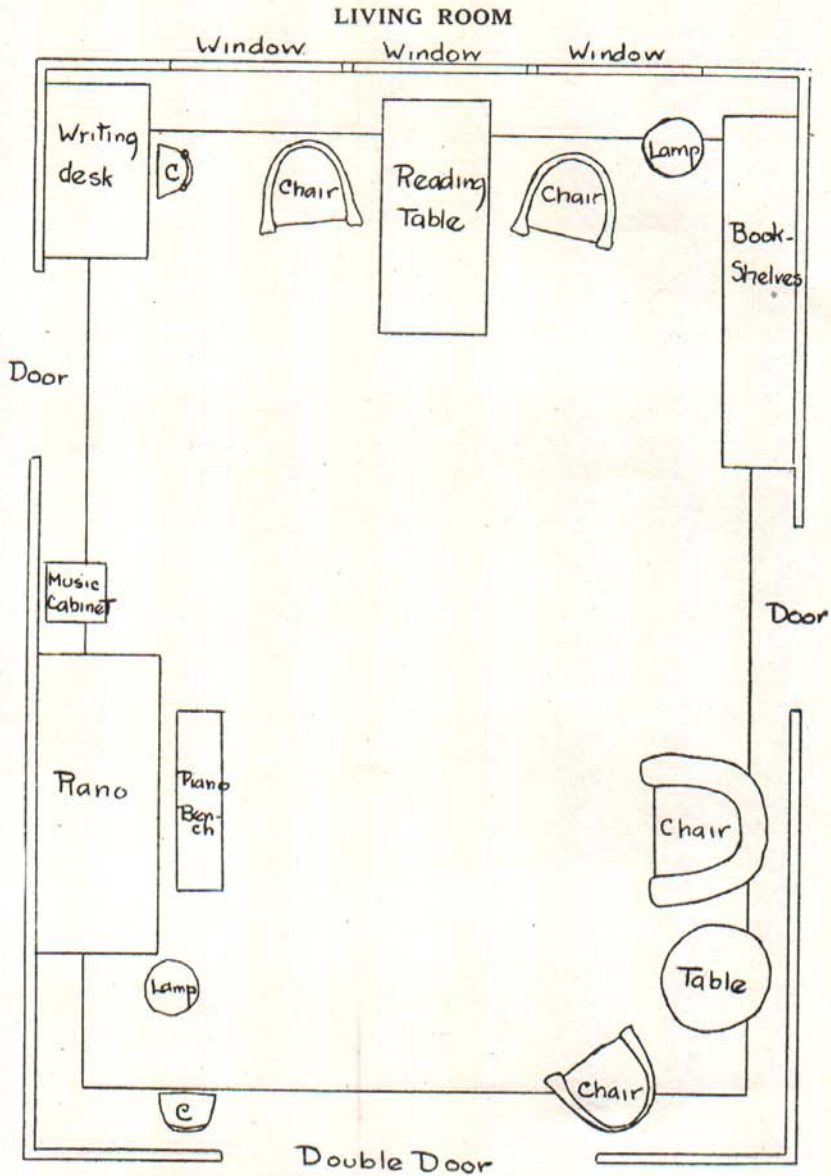
It is wise to think of the lines of travel in each room so that furniture will not be in the way.

The following drawings may be helpful when making a study of furniture arrangement.



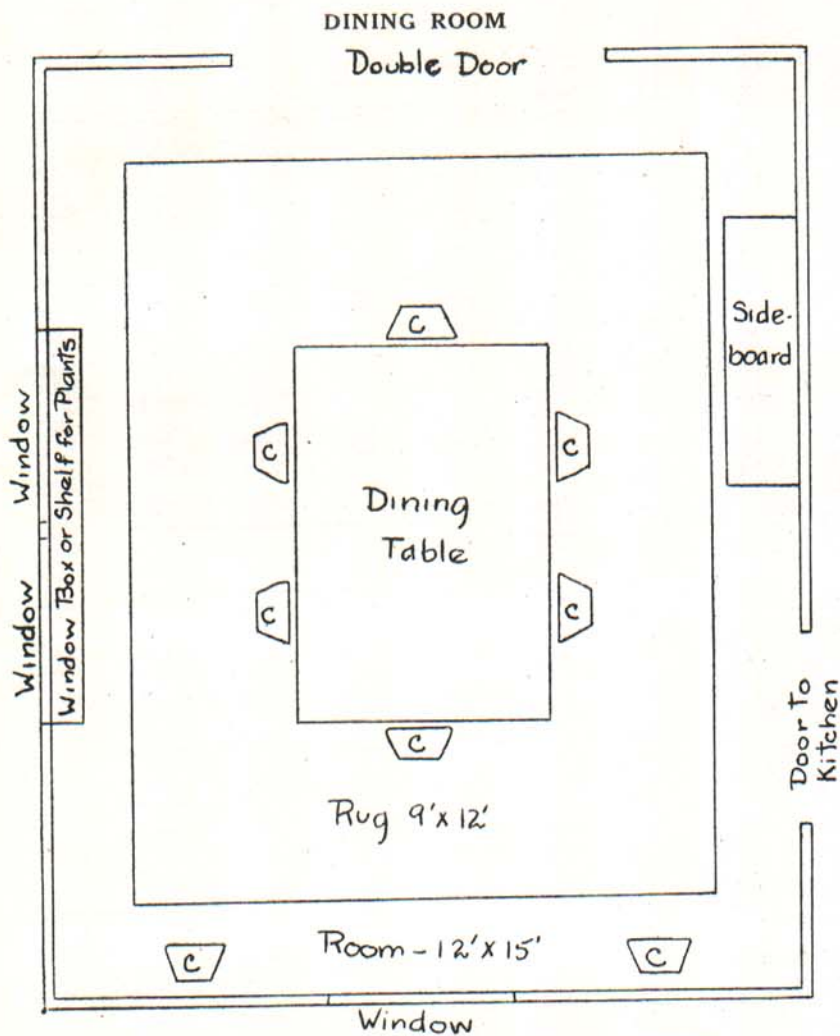


This living room shows a poor arrangement of furniture and rugs.

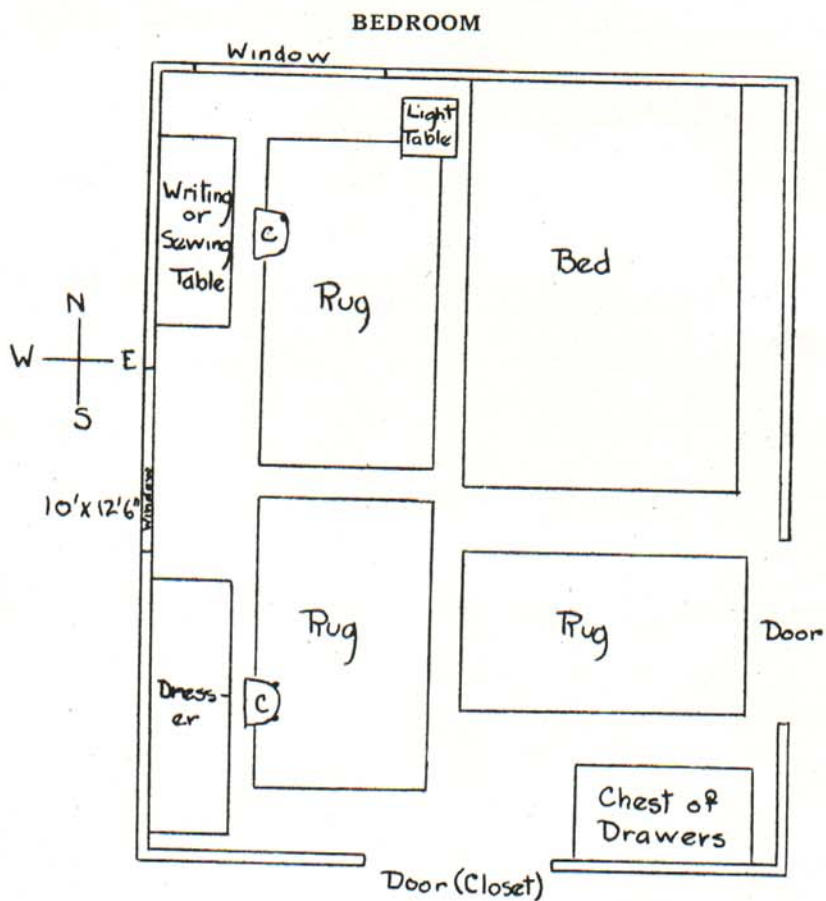


The same living room with furniture rearranged.





This dining room shows a good arrangement of furniture.



A bedroom showing a good arrangement of furniture and rugs.

Note: The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Miss Edna V. Smith, of East Lansing, who kindly permitted the photographing of her home.



