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Space for Living: Interior and Exterior

Michigan State University

Cooperative Extension Service

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October 1971

6 pages

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design

Extension Bulletin E-730
HOME and FAMILY SERIES
October 1971

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design

the givens

interior exterior

space for living

interior & exterior

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Design is a process for ordering the environment—for organizing spaces and coordinating colors, textures, shapes and forms into arrangements that are visually appealing and functionally satisfying. The living spaces in your home environment—both interior and exterior—can better meet the needs of your family when they are thoughtfully planned, rather than haphazardly arrayed.

There are similarities in the way you use your living spaces, and it follows that the approach to planning these spaces can also be similar. This brochure will acquaint you with:

- (1) ways of creating a closer more intimate relationship between the interior and exterior living spaces in your home environment, and
- (2) ways of applying principles of design to improve your home environment both visually and functionally.

The discussion is based on seven general principles of design. These are spotlighted by key ideas (1) the givens, (2) needs, (3) plan, (4) order, (5) relationships, (6) similarity, and (7) harmony—then stated in simple terms, and, finally, applied to interior and exterior design situations.

Design begins with an inventory of the "givens."

Start with what you have—the "givens." Take stock of existing conditions—the existing natural and structural boundaries defined by your home grounds and shelter.

Such an inventory will reveal the positive and negative features of your home, and will help you formulate a plan to improve the design of your immediate environment. Without some limitations to work within, it would be very difficult to know where to begin or how to proceed.

What is the size and shape of the room?
Is there any permanently installed mechanical equipment? Where is it?

Are there any wall spaces unbroken by openings?

How many windows and doors are there and where are they placed?

Where are the paths that people will make when they move into and through the room?

What are the neighboring spaces—both inside and outside—to be used for?

How large is your lot and what is its shape?

Where is the house located on the lot and what is its relation to the street?

What kind of trees and plants are there, and where are they located?

What can you see of your neighbors' yards and houses?

Are there any utility poles, fire hydrants, or other community or utility equipment in your yard or within your view?

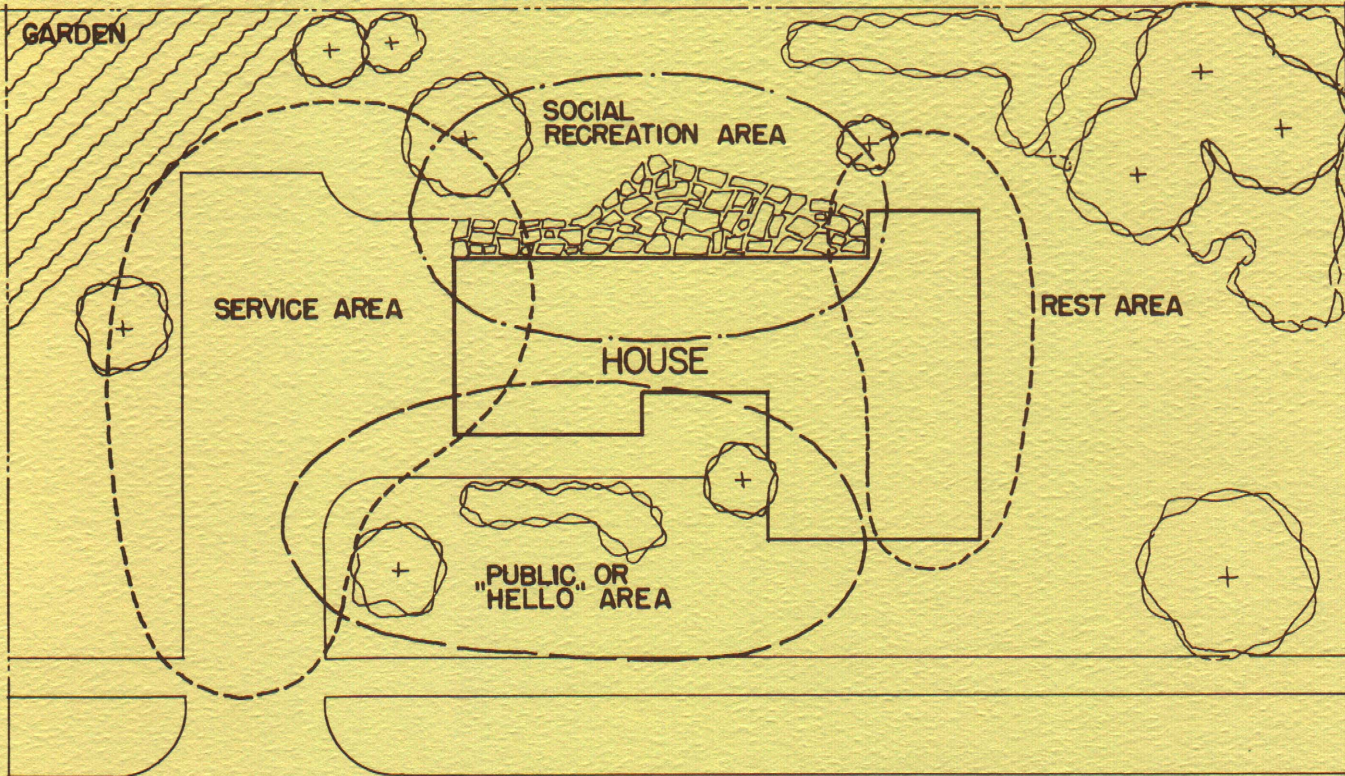
needs 2

Design incorporates the needs of people.

Decide how the spaces will be used, by whom and how many. The activities of family members in and around the home usually fall into three major categories, for which specific spaces are needed: (1) private activities, (2) social activities, and (3) work or service activities.

Ideally, spaces inside and outside the home designated to meet these needs would be adjacent to each other in the overall plan. Outside service areas such as the garage, storage for lawn and garden equipment, the garden itself, would be near the kitchen, food storage, utility and laundry areas inside the home.

Exterior living spaces such as patios, porches, decks, etc., would be a natural extension of the living and dining areas on the interior. Picturesque gardens with bird baths and bird-houses, away from the busier outdoor living areas, are quiet companions to the private spaces of rest and retreat inside the home.



interior exterior

What social activities will the living and dining rooms of your home facilitate:

- conversation?
- games?
- TV viewing?
- stereo listening?
- quiet reading?
- group eating?

Does the furniture arrangement isolate people or bring them together?

Are there landing surfaces for coffee or books convenient to each seating area?

Does each chair direct your attention to the TV when you'd rather be reading or contemplating a picture, the view, or an interesting composition of light and shadow on the wall?

How often is your patio used and for what purpose:

- sitting and sunning?
- family meals?
- entertaining guests?

Is it conveniently located to food preparation centers inside the house?

Is it shaded during the hottest hours and protected from winds?

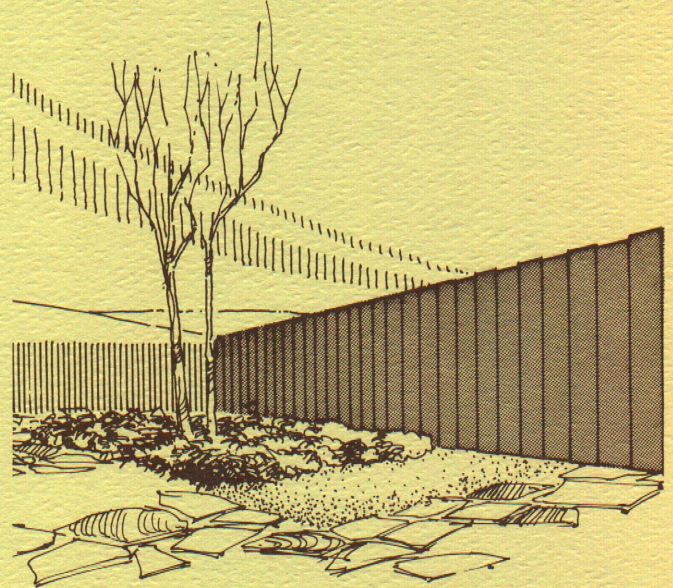
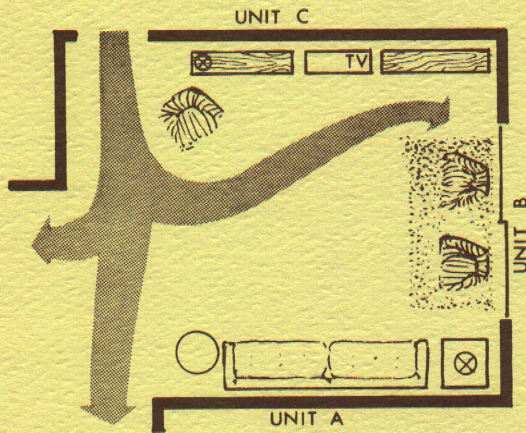
Is there space nearby for sheltering furniture and equipment during rain showers, if needed?

Is the transition from home to patio and patio to lawn inviting and safe?

plan 3

Design is a record of logical thinking.

Make a plan—in your mind or on paper— of how to organize the total space of your yard or your room so as to adapt existing features and limitations to meet the needs of the family to the greatest satisfaction possible.



interior exterior

Where will the major pieces of furniture be placed?

How does the placement relate to traffic patterns and dominant structural and mechanical features of the room?

Are furniture pieces grouped into functional and visually appealing units, or is there little apparent logic to the relationship among items?

How does the furniture look against its background?

Does furniture placement encourage activities for which the room will be used?

Are the dresser and clothes storage chests near the closet in the bedroom?

Is there a lamp and window near your favorite chair for reading?

Where is the "hello" area of your home? Does it combine in a logical way, the house entrance with the garage, or carport and parking area?

Is the walkway a fixed width or does it widen near the drive and doorway to accommodate people and packages?

Is your out-door patio area on the same level with indoor living or family rooms, or is it connected by generous landing and safe steps?

Is the garage-storage area for trash and tools convenient to use but attractively screened from view?

Does your house block easy access between front and back yards?

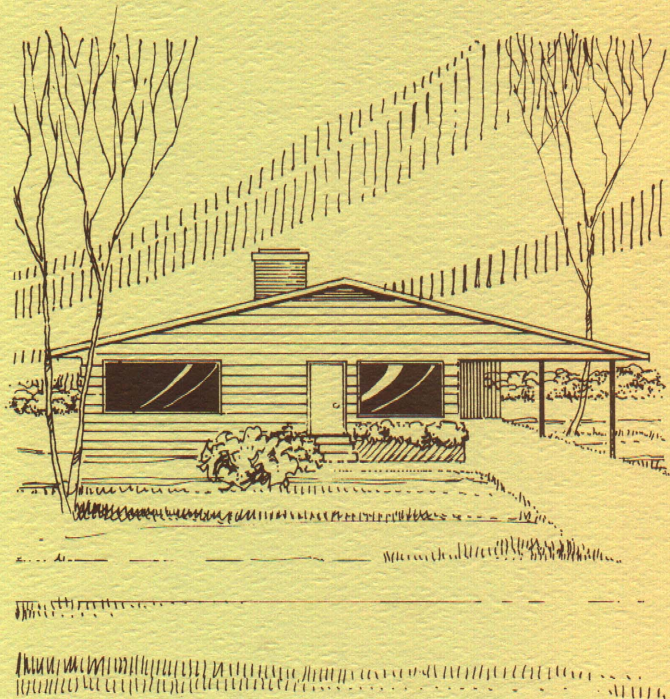
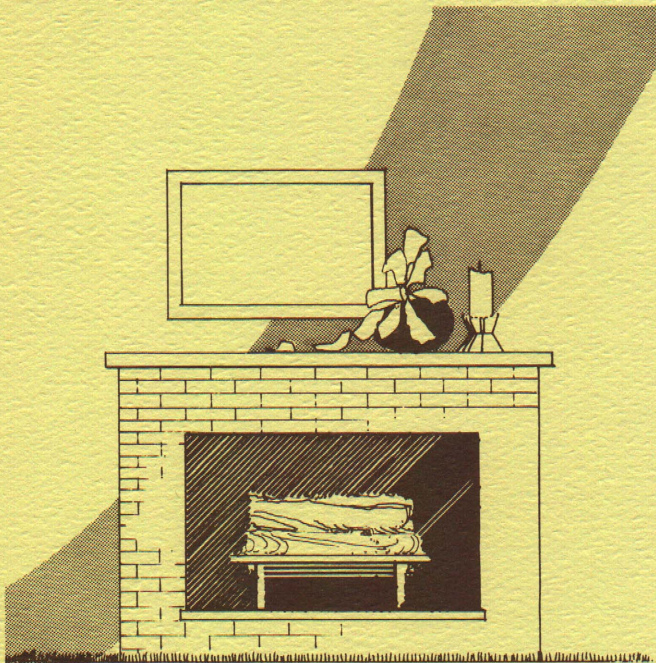
order 4

Design is a sense of order without being obvious.

Experiment with creating a feeling of visual balance in your room and lawn space that is comfortable without being commonplace.

Much family life today follows a casual, relaxed, and unpretentious pattern. It is best accommodated by spaces that are informally arranged into flexible, functional groupings that have a sense of ease and continuity with stability, yet without the static rigidity of more formal, classical plans.

If you can divide the space in a room, on a wall, in the yard in such a way as to encourage free rhythmic movement of the eye as well as people, in an orderly and logical progression, the effect can be dynamic, intriguing and satisfying.



interior exterior

Does your sofa have to be flanked by identical lamps and end tables in order to look secure against its background?

Is your room large enough to indulge a desk or chair or sofa placed at right angles to the wall, rather than parallel, in order to break the box-like effect which "perimeter placement," close to the walls, creates?

Could a grouping of candles in different sizes and colors placed to one side of your mantle provide a more interesting complement to the picture in the center than two candles positioned like sentinels on either side?

Does one wall or end of your room seem too heavily weighted by fireplace, patterned draperies, bookshelves or large bulky furniture items?

Does the front view of your home look monotonous because the plantings of trees and shrubbery are too symmetrical?

Do your plantings hug the walls of your house and the outside limits of the yard rather than extend into the yard space where they can be seen and enjoyed from inside the house?

Would a clump of trees to one side of your front lawn bring better visual balance to the view of your home than a regular placement of trees across the width of the yard?

Are there lamp posts, fences and other features in the landscape, whose color, height and line contribute to the overall feeling of balance in the composition?

relationships 5

interior exterior

Design involves the relationship between the parts and the whole.

When organizing furnishings and plantings in the room and landscape, consider the size, shape and weight relationships between them and the spaces they occupy.

Plants and shrubbery in the natural environment constantly change in color, texture, form and mass while occupying a stationary position in the landscape. To introduce such variety into the home interior, home furnishings may be reassembled and relocated as frequently as the family finds comfortable.

The appearance of plants at maturity should guide you in their selection and placement in the "lawn scape;" while shifting arrangements of accessories can constantly challenge your imagination in creating fresh compositions for the interior.

Do table surfaces, dresser tops and shelves look confused and cluttered when a mat or tray could help to unify unrelated, but used-together items?

Is the picture above the sofa or chest similar in size and shape to the space it occupies, or does it look lost and lonely?

Is the portable lamp tall enough to read by, but not too tall or heavy for the table that supports it?

Is there variation in height among items in accessory groupings around the room?

Are small pictures grouped closely enough to be seen as a unit instead of as separate items?

Are small plants grouped in large enough masses to create a meaningful unit?

Are there intermediate and taller plants nearby to create variety in scale?

Are the larger plant materials in your "lawnscape" higher than two-thirds the house height (eave line)?

Have you used colored foliage and flowering plants to balance the attraction and emphasis of larger, more massive plants and trees?

similarity 6

interior exterior

Design is finding the kinship between dissimilar objects.

Learn to look for similarities of line, shape, color, texture and mood in man-made and natural objects that will be used and seen together.

The association of objects that have something in common builds rhythm and defines the character of a room or lawn scape. The natural textures of wood, stone and clay are most compatible with earthy tones of green, brown, orange, yellow and greyed blues; while shiny, highly reflective surfaces (glass, chrome, steel) are reinforced by cool, sharp colors and hard, precise geometric forms.

Do colors in your room have something in common:

- temperature?
- tone?
- degree of lightness and darkness?

Are the shapes and forms in your furnishings and accessories dominated by curved or straight lines?

What common thread unites the grouping of pictures on your wall:

- theme?
- mood?
- technique?
- color?

If there are several patterned areas in your room are they similar in scale?

- color?
- mood?

Is the color of your home exterior compatible with nature's subtle hues?

Would a brick, concrete, woodchip, or flagstone pathway be most harmonious with the style and character of your house and garden?

Does your landscape depict one basic idea:

- formality?
- informality?
- dominance of right angles or curved lines?
- natural or controlled plant growth?

harmony 7

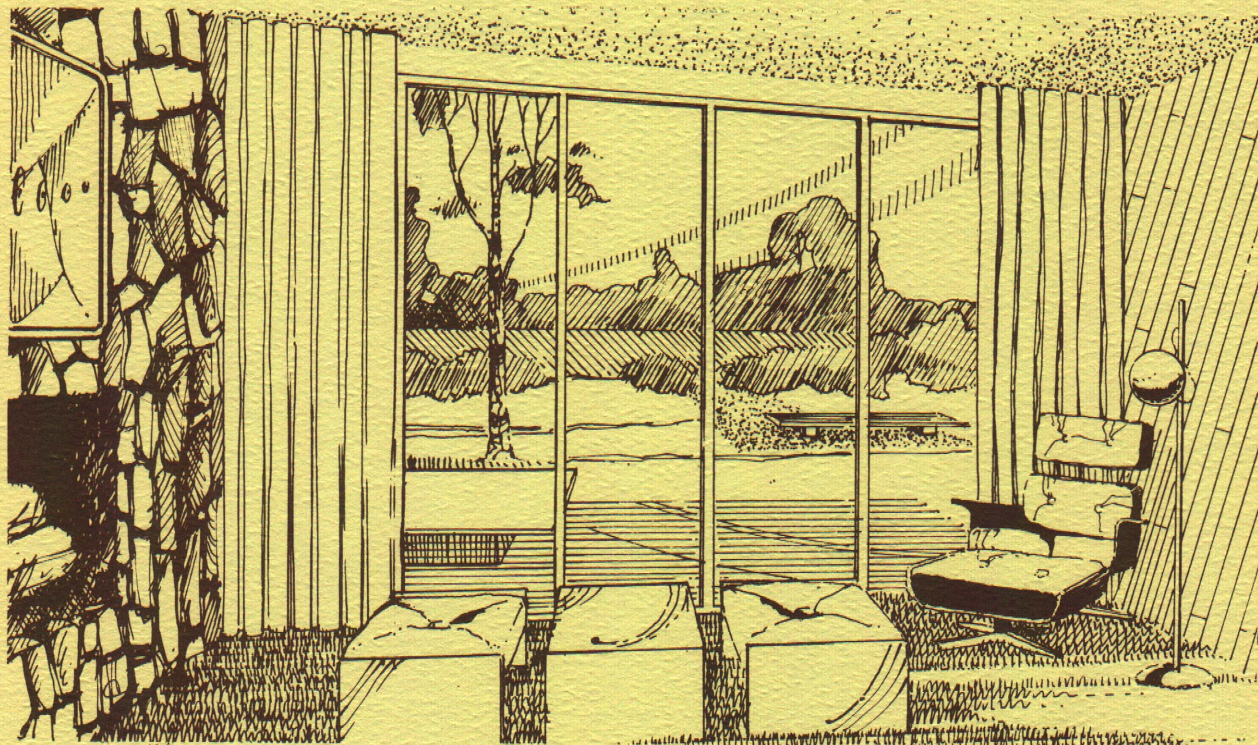
Design is more than the sum of its parts.

Strive for a feeling of unity and totality in the design of your interior and exterior spaces.

Space is three-dimensional—it has length, width and depth. Objects in space can be seen from many directions and the relationship between objects will change as the perspective of the viewer changes.

Spaces which pass the test of "general viewing" contain areas which also maintain a conscious relatedness to adjoining spaces, creating a feeling of harmony and organization within the total space.

Attention to detail and a touch of the unexpected provides satisfaction on an intimate scale which adds depth and enrichment to the total scheme.



interior exterior

Is there repetition of color, texture, and shape to lead the eye in a rhythmic pattern from one unit to the next?

Do opposite walls attract equal but not competitive interest?

Does your room contain a surprise or two to delight the eye:

- a ceramic bird perched nearby a potted plant?
- miniature glass figures reflecting light from the sill of a window?
- a collection of shells or water-polished stones inside a cool dish?
- a basket of pine cones beside the fireplace?

Will your landscape pass the test of viewing from several directions, or is it on display to the neighbors and passerbys only?

Does your landscape hold interest on the individual, human scale in the form of small oases:

- a planter or stone grouping in a neglected, out-of-the-way corner?
- a moss-covered stump nestled in the garden or near the front walk?
- a row of potted geraniums marking the boundary of your porch or patio?

Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. George S. McIntyre, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, Mich.