

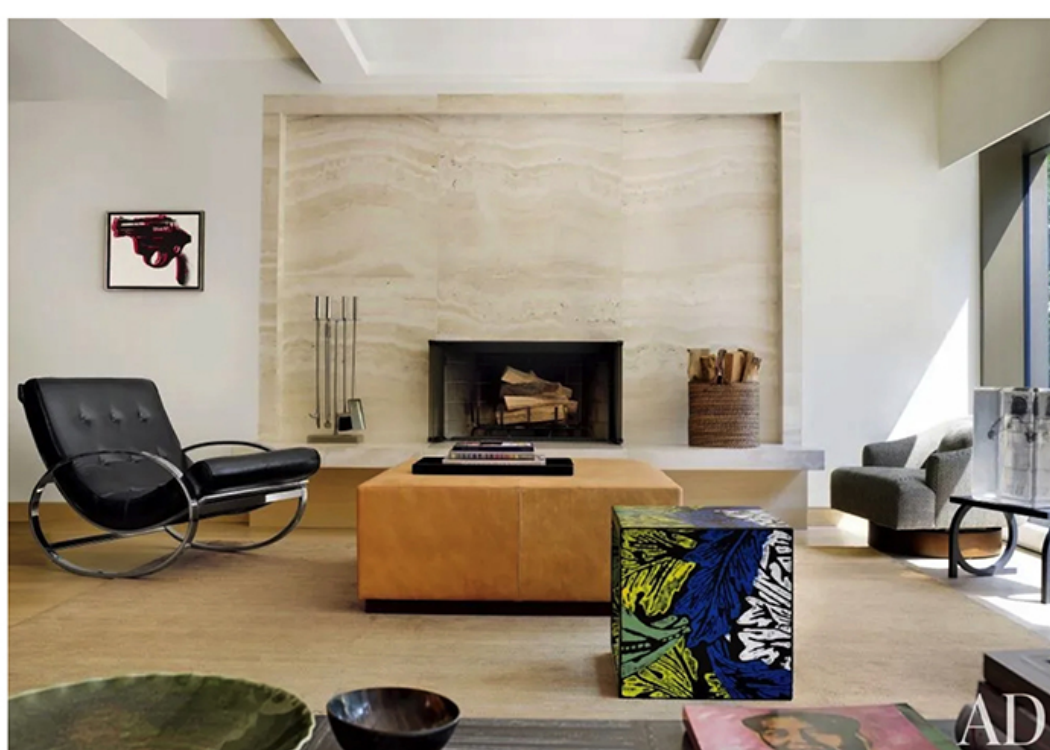
# Do This First When You're Decorating a Room

Hint: It's got nothing to do with buying furniture

By Hampton Williams Hofer

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Decorating a room is a little bit like getting yourself dressed, in that the order of things matters. Outfitting, for most people, goes something like this: undergarments first, followed by layers of clothes, accessories, shoes, maybe a coat. You don't stand around in a bold necklace and heels (unless you're that horrible receptionist from *Love Actually*), scouring your closet for a dress to match. The same goes for decorating. You start with the bottom layer, the flat surfaces—that is, floors and walls.



A John Pawson-designed Manhattan living room with an inventive floor plan. Decor includes a vintage Milo Baughman rocker, an ottoman covered in an Edelman leather, a Richard Woods cube table, and a vintage swivel chair upholstered in a Loro Piana linen. Pieter Estersohn

Nashville-based designer Sarah Bartholomew begins her decorative process with the floor plan. “The first thing I do when I see a room is lay it out in my head. You want the layout to be functional and balanced. Colors, textures, and furniture all come later.” And when it's time for those colors and textures, the best way to set the vibe, according to Juniper Studio's Jenny Komenda, is with a perfect rug. “It's so easy to tweak the other choices in the room to fit the rug, but finding a perfect rug after furniture, soft goods, and paint colors are set—well, that's going to take a lot more time.”



In designer Jenny Komenda's living room, a statement rug inspired the rest of the room's design. Photo: Courtesy of Jenny Komenda

Nothing pulls a room together like a rug, particularly one cut to fit the space. Oak City Interiors designer Jessie Short also recommends taking to the floor first: “A large rug makes a room feel complete, providing a cohesiveness that is reassuring when things are just getting started.” But maybe you're boasting some gorgeous wide-plank pine floors, or maybe you're working with a pre-existing carpet, or a rug is otherwise not suitable. In those cases, go vertical, and begin by decorating the walls.



At the Mark Cunningham-designed Connecticut home of Edie Parker accessories designer Brett Heyman, the living room, coated in a green hue by Ralph Lauren Paint, showcases a large Richard Serra etching—a statement piece that surely dictated the rest of the room's colors and designs. William Waldron

Walls are your best platform for display. Sometimes, a whole room may revolve around one piece of art—just as you may, on some occasions, arrange your entire outfit around an exceptional scarf. It is important to consider which of your items take decorative priority. Say, for instance, you were lucky enough to inherit a Picasso. You certainly aren't going to scrap it just because it's from his Blue Period and clashes with the fabric on your chairs. You'll find a rug, furnishings, everything to suit that painting. Chicago's Alexandra Kaehler says walls are the place to start: “I think your walls should be decorated first. Everything else can be secondary if you have a collection of meaningful, beautiful pieces of art.” Like, for instance, that old Picasso you've got lying around.