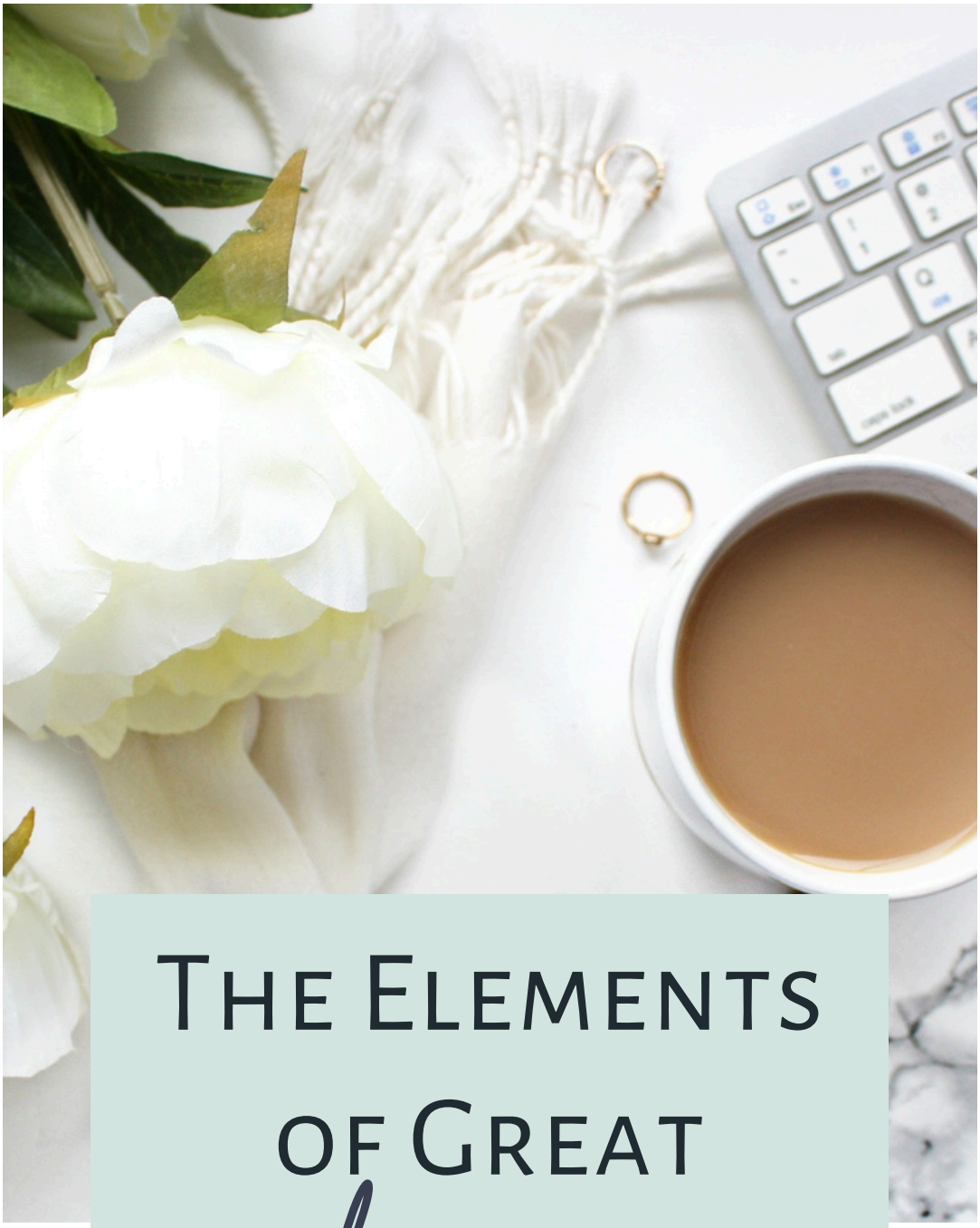

The Elements of Great *design*

AZURE DESIGN STUDIO LLC.COM

MEET YOUR *designer*

ALL ABOUT ALICIA

I'm Alicia, as the founder of Azure Design Studio LLC, I specialize in crafting elevated, eco-conscious interiors that blend aesthetics with sustainability.

I bring a strategic, results-driven approach to every project, whether it's transforming luxury short-term rentals or curating timeless residential spaces.

With Elements of Great Design, I'm sharing key principles that shape stunning, functional interiors, empowering you to create spaces that captivate and inspire.

INTERIOR DESIGN 101

In the past, you may have relied on your intuition in order to decorate, stage or redesign, but no longer! This guide will put words in the form of principles and elements to the intuition you've relied upon. Your vision will become more clear because you'll understand WHY it felt wrong, as well as WHAT you can do to fix it.

There is a fine art to composition, whether in paint, music or decoration. There are also basic principles and elements that apply to the creation of a harmonious composition. I've read countless books that consistently disagree on the specific definition of the principles and elements of interior design, but have made a good attempt to clear the confusion in this guide.

> *"Put your hand in mine and let us help one another to see things better."*
>
> - Claude Monet

PRINCIPLES AND ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

For ease of understanding and clarification, I'm going to break down the principles of design and define them as "general, fundamental laws or concepts of interior design." I'm going to define the elements as "component parts of that principle."While many would say that all of these are fundamentals or principles of design, I think you'll see that the way I break it down helps to separate and clarify each one more easily.

In interior design, those principles are proportion, scale, emphasis, balance, rhythm and style. These principles will guide you as you direct the elements or components of design which are: line, form, color and value, texture, pattern, light and space.

notes

Broken principles are what make us FEEL wrong about a room or space. People don't necessarily recognize exactly WHAT is bothering them but they know when it feels off or wrong. Why? We are all trained to look for correct proportion, scale, emphasis, balance, rhythm and style in everything we see! Understanding and following these principles is what will effect the composition as a whole and create harmony.

Principles of Good Design...

- Proportion
- Scale and Visual Weight
- Rhythm
- Balance
- Style
- Emphasis

Elements that Effect Those Principles...

- Arrangement – Space and Flow
- Color and Value
- Lines
- Texture
- Pattern
- Light

Design Principle Cheat Sheet

For quick reference, here is a design principle cheat sheet but will delve into each one in this lesson:

Proportion

The relationship of one part of an object to its other parts. Each room or object is comprised of parts that should be in proportion to each other. i.e. An oversized lampshade on a lamp would make the object out of proportion

Scale

Considering the size and dimensions of one object to another. i.e. a small picture above a couch

Rhythm

The repetition of form, color, lines or texture in order to unify the space.

Balance

Creating equilibrium in a room by balancing the pieces to unify the space. Evenly distributing the visual weight of the furniture so no one piece overwhelms the room.

Style

The style or mood of the room is cohesive or unified. Making sure the furnishings are in keeping with the style or integrity of the home and room.

Emphasis

Every room needs a focal point or emphasis.Ideally, this is the area that should draw the eye in the room.

ASSESSING FIRST IMPRESSION

Ask yourself the following “first impression” questions in order to recognize which principles in the room are being broken:

1. **What are the architectural features in the room and are they in proportion to one another?** Remember, the room makes up the whole, while the architectural features (windows, doors, fireplace, and moldings) should be in proportion. While you usually cannot change the features, you can change the way you see the features. Quickly recognize the positive elements you will want to emphasize while recognizing any problem elements that need to be distracted from.

2. **What is the size of this room and are the pieces in the room of similar scale to the room AND to each other?** I’ve seen many designers break this rule in the interest of creating a sense of space. They’ll remove all leaves in a table or place a small sofa in a large room. While we want to create a larger space, be wary of breaking scale

3. **Is there a pattern or repetition of objects, color, form or texture to the room?**

4. **When you enter the room are the pieces balanced to each other and throughout?** If the room and walls were a rowboat, would it tip to one side?

5. **What is the architectural style of the home? What is the style of the rooms?**

6. **What and where did our eyes go first and was it positive?** Simply put, what was the first thing you noticed in the room? Many times it’s not what it should be!

PROPORTION AND ROOMS

Believe it or not, there is a science to correct proportion as it relates to shapes, thus furniture and architecture. To create a harmonious rectangle or shaped room, simply divide a square in half and add the halved part to the end of the square. If you measured a rectangular room or window you would find that the length of the object is usually 1.5 times the width or thereabouts. Problems arise when these proportions are quite a bit different.

Tip

You can visually alter the principle of proportion in a room by using the element of color. While dark colors bring walls towards you, light colors recede. In a long and narrow room, you can paint the end walls darker in order to visually alter the proportions. Likewise, it is always a good idea to keep ceilings light or white in order to promote height in a room.

Tip

Use sheer window coverings to create the appearance of larger windows or dark window coverings to give the window more visual weight.

THREE STEP PROPORTION AND SCALE FORMULA

Here's a simple formula to follow when assessing the scale of a room and its pieces:

1 **What is the size of the room?**

2 **Is the furniture to scale with the size of the room and if there are pieces not to scale, can you remove them?** For large rooms, choose large pieces and for small rooms choose fewer and smaller pieces (too many small pieces make a small room feel chaotic and cluttered).

3 **Are the pieces to scale with each other in visual weight, height and size?** The end tables of a couch and side tables of a bed should never be more than 3 inches different in height.The same applies for the height of a coffee table in relationship to the seat of a couch. We'll talk about visual weight next.

A small room with oversized furniture appears cramped, while a large room with diminutive furniture appears empty.

One of the biggest mistakes often made is placing a small picture above a couch. A couch is large in scale, but should rarely be the emphasis in a room, so let's not make it one by placing a small object over it.Likewise the coffee table and end tables should be similarly scaled to the couch.

VISUAL WEIGHT

When you think about scale of furniture in your rooms, you will deal only with how an object looks, its visual weight (not its actual weight). Each item has a visual weight that can change with shape, color and pattern thus effecting scale or relationship.Sometimes an object can have the exact same dimensions as another but not be to scale because of the visual weight factors above (shape, color and pattern).

You can group objects in order to create scale as well. In this picture the two pictures are “to scale” with the couch.

In our previous example, the small picture over the couch grouped next to other pictures gives the grouping correct scale to the couch.

Creatively change the size of an object in order to create correct scale...

You can change the size of a table by adding height in order to appropriate the scale.

The vase gives it more visual weight as well.

A group of objects above a fireplace helps to create scale.

A FEW RULES TO REMEMBER ABOUT VISUAL WEIGHT

1. **Shape Effects Visual Weight** – An overstuffed chair— has more visual weight than a wooden chair of the same dimensions.

2. **Color Effects Visual Weight** – Bright colors add weight while neutral colors take away weight.

3. **Pattern Effects Visual Weight** – Bold patterns add visual weight, while solid colors reduce visual weight.

Big rooms should have big furniture. Small rooms require small furniture and not a lot of it. Big rooms can easily handle bold patterns and color when it comes to furnishings. Small rooms need visually light furnishings.

RHYTHM AND SYMMETRY

Is there a pattern or repetition of objects, color, form or texture to the room?

People are drawn to like objects: a pair of lamps, similarly colored accessories, and similar shapes in a room.All of these are examples of repetition, and help to create rhythm, symmetry and cohesion in a room and home.Likewise, we are drawn to symmetry as it relates to an echo of similar objects down a center point.

note

Symmetry refers to the same arrangement of parts, objects, or forms on both sides of an imagined or real centerline. This is usually seen in traditional arrangements. (see Mantel picture)

Asymmetry refers to the balance between objects of different sizes as the result of placement usually seen in contemporary settings. (We'll detail this further when we talk about Balance)

Liken rhythm and repetition in a home as a steady beat in a song. While barely noticed in the overall composition, it is the tie that binds within the room and throughout the home. By creating repetition within a room and home, you are linking each space and creating harmony within the home. Conversely, it jars the senses if there is a complete change of color, style and feel from one room to the next.

An easy way to create rhythm in a room is through the use of symmetry and pairs. Symmetry gives harmony to a room because it balances the tensions on the eye. We tend to view a room much like we would read a book, from side-to-side (not from top to bottom). When an arrangement is symmetrical, it will always contain at least one pair of items. Homes are an expression of who we are and what we aspire to be. Rhythm--accomplished through symmetry, pairs and repetition, results in harmony within a room and peaceful transitions between rooms.

MANTELS

It's almost instinctual to arrange objects on and around a mantel in symmetrical ways. Make your centerpiece powerful and arrange around it with matching candles, or objects d'art. >>

Look at the picture to the left, how does it make you feel? Symmetrical arrangements generally are naturally pleasing to our senses and provoke a relaxing and soothing response. When symmetry and cohesion are lacking, it creates a sort of visual ambiguity, which is psychologically upsetting.

Rhythm is created through the use of:

- Pairs - Pillows and artwork
- Pattern – Pillows and rug
- Color – Yellow as an accent color

All of these factors help to create movement and cohesion in a room.>>

The bedroom in the same home displays symmetry, which promotes a sense of peace and sanctuary needed in a bedroom; and rhythm (the red accents are continued).

Hands On Exercise:

Walk through the rooms of your home and note the rhythmic forms, colors, patterns and styles. Note any rooms that seem out of place to the rest of the home and see if you can't promote rhythm by bringing in pairs of items, color or pattern.

Danger:

There is a danger with using too much rhythm and symmetry, so don't overdo it! Think rhythm in terms of the larger context of cohesion, repetitiveness and balance while creating gorgeous associations within the room and from room to room.

BALANCE

When you enter the room, are the pieces balanced in relation to each other and in their placement throughout the space?

Balance is another important principle related to rhythm, symmetry and space.It refers to the equilibrium among forms in a room. All of the furnishings, large and small, should be distributed evenly throughout the space, not just to one side of the room, for example.

Visualization:

On a piece of paper, draw a large dot one inch from the left side of the paper and stare at it. Because it is not centered, it appears to “weight” the paper down to the left and is upsetting to the eye. To relieve the tension, we need to place another large dot an inch from the right side of the paper on the same axis as the first dot.

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Visualization: Think about famous works of art, particularly landscapes.Usually, when you reverse them, balance is still achieved through the careful use of color, pattern and weight.

Hands On: Walk through the rooms of your home and note the balance in each room by drawing your invisible plumb line down the center. Purposefully tilt a painting on the wall and stand back. Your need to straighten it out displays the tension felt when a room is out of balance..

THE SEATING NUMBERS YOU NEED TO KNOW

STANDARD SOFA LENGTHS

- **72":** Seats up to 2 people.
- **108":** Seats 3 comfortably lounging or 4 people sitting upright.
- **84":** Seats 2 people comfortably, 3 people who are familiar with each other. .
- **96":** Seats 3 people comfortably.
- **120":** Seats 4 people comfortably, although it's rare that 4 people would actually want to sit on the same sofa unless it's a friendly group watching a sporting or entertainment event.

COFFEE & ACCESSORY TABLES

COFFEE TABLE MEASUREMENTS

Size matters: A coffee table can become a major focal point in a space due to its fairly central location in a room, and because it's highly functional. It can be a place to put your feet up in lieu of an ottoman, or it can become an impromptu dining surface, not to mention a place to hold books and objects.

- **15" to 18":** Height of typical coffee tables.
- **0" to 2":** The ideal height above or below the sofa or chair seat when placing a coffee table in a seating area. A coffee table should generally be the same as, or within two inches of the seat height of adjacent chairs and sofas. This helps ensure that the table is convenient for reaching items or for propping your feet on it.
- **20" to 24":** Ideal height for a coffee table convenient for serving food and beverages.
- **3" to 6":** The ideal height above the sofa when pairing a coffee table with sofa seat when the coffee table will be used frequently for serving coffee and tea. A higher table makes the rituals of pouring and serving much more comfortable.

COFFEE TABLE LENGTHS AND DIAMETERS

Coffee table lengths should never exceed sofa lengths. When this happens, not only are sofas more difficult to access, but you run the risk of banging into coffee table corners more often. Ideally, your coffee table length should be about two thirds the length of your sofa, except for round tables, which can be more challenging to pair with sofas. Coffee tables can be as small as one-half the overall sofa length but I find that coffee tables this proportionally small are not nearly as functional or visually balanced.

You certainly do not want your coffee table to be longer than your sofa, and you do not want it to be too diminutive compared to the sofa's overall dimensions....remember our scale lesson!

BUYING THE RIGHT SIZE AREA RUG

Getting the wrong area rug in a space is a designers big pet peave! Area rugs are a useful to in defining spaces within a larger space; they anchor furniture so that a room "reads" correctly to the eye; and they can make a room appear larger when properly sized. To keep area rugs sized right, you also need a tape measure to make sure the size of the rug is such that it fits the room in which you placed it, and can do the job you have assigned it, i.e., defining a conversation space, filling an entire room, or accenting a small area. Here are the general rules:

- **12" to 18":** The best distance between an area rug and at least one wall is between 12 inches and 18 inches so that a foot to a foot and a half of flooring is visible otherwise it might look like wall-to-wall carpeting that did not quite make it. In very large rooms, you can go up to 24 inches between wall and rug.

- **36":** A dining area rug should span about 36 inches wider on all sides of a dining table to allow chairs to pull out easily without catching on the edge. If this isn't possible, it might be better to forgo an area rug here altogether.

- At a minimum, the front legs of your sofa and chairs should sit on an area rug. Ideally, the entire grouping should sit completely within an area rug. That means the smallest you can get away with for a conversation area is 5 x 8 feet- that's just large enough to accommodate a sofa and chair. Anything smaller ends up looking like a tiny island in the middle of your living room with a coffee table as its only inhabitant.

I hope you enjoyed this Design Guide and that it helped you see your home in a new light! As always, I'm here to help if you're feeling stumped or need some design guidance.

Alicia

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