

Whether you are creating a formal drawing room to entertain guests, or a casual family "snug" to curl up and watch a movie in, the key elements should be comfort, style and versatility, says Hedgeroe's Rhona Roe.

The Drawing room derives its name from the more formal "withdrawing" room, where women went to chat after meals. But with space at a premium these days, this room needs to be multifunctional. I have found following a few ground rules helps achieve this.



The sitting room



SCALE; High ceiling or low, and whatever the shape of your room, the fireplace creates an instant focal point. If possible, expand the size of the grate; it will look more inviting. The fire surround should be in proportion to the room, big rather than too

small. If stone is too pricey, have a joiner make a simple one from MDF (medium density board) and paint it. Seating arranged around the fire is very welcoming, so take advantage of it. If you do not have a flue, look up www.modernhearth.com for freestanding fireplaces which look beautiful and use bioethanol fuels. The bi-product is H₂O, so very environmentally-friendly.

SEATING ARRANGEMENTS; A sofa with a chair either side gives a U shape and allows all guests to face each other for intimate chats. A console placed behind the sofa, with oversized lamps or a vase of flowers will vary the furniture heights. L shaped arrangements tend to require guests to twist to make eye contact. Two sofas facing each other give symmetry to a room allowing guests to face each

other. A pleasing layout but too much distance between the sofas looks formal

and uncomfortable for friends. Substituting one sofa for two armchairs with a table set between is a personal favourite. A lamp placed on top gives intimate light. Seating covered in pale leather gets a contemporary look, velvet or chenille for a sumptuous one. Silk damasks lend a formal elegance and linen and floral cotton loose covers give a "country house" feel. I have found that just about anything works as a coffee table. An old narrow chest for tight spaces, an upholstered ottoman for extra seating. Rattan baskets for storage or an old dining table with legs cut down or a group of mix and match table of the same height.

VARY THE HEIGHT; I have mentioned placing a console behind the sofa with lamps. It is essential to break up the heights in the room, otherwise it will look boring. Cabinets either side of the fireplace (matching) give balance, as do bookcases. The colourful spines look great by firelight. A little writing desk is always useful and most rooms have an awkward corner where one will fit.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE TV. My urge is generally to hide the TV and the paraphernalia that goes with it. I have used old wardrobes, but unless you are sitting directly in front of the TV, the doors can restrict your view. It is not too difficult to have a bespoke cabinet made, allowing you to incorporate doors that fold completely back.

LIGHTING; A combination of floor, wall and table lamps lets you create a range of moods. Avoid harsh overhead lights and where possible fit dimmers. There are some very good low energy bulbs available now.

COLOUR; Gentle, historic tones in soft greys, stone and putty are the best colours for relaxing. They complement any variety of wood. A very strong colour on a wall at the back of a sofa is a winner for displaying artwork. Don't be afraid of colours such as burnt umber, aubergine, sienna, chocolate or deep mustard, they are the best colours for displaying art on. You get the impact as you enter the room, but have your back to it when you are sitting. Powder pink, (be careful) lilac, palest apple and what I call "smoky blue" are perfect for a country house look.

The sofa: Spend a little money getting a really good, well sprung piece and consider scotch guarding the fabric. Make sure you are comfortable, spend time sitting in it before you buy; you and your sofa will need to get along for quite a while, so it's best to love each other from the start.



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