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# KEYNOTES CREATING ORDER AND SYMMETRY

Experts reveal how to make it work as Katharine Pooley has done

Symmetry and order may seem inconsistent with the very notion of creative interior design, but experts say that these classical qualities underpin the most relaxing schemes.

"Symmetry is easy to live with. It brings a feeling of calm to a room," says Jenny Gibbs, principal of KLC School of Design. "You can't create a harmonious room without some sort of order." A sense of serenity, she explains, is achieved by placing furnishings of the same visual weight within a largely symmetrical room plan. Where does the formula work best? "Its classical roots," she says, "make the idea particularly effective for traditional or

'contemporary classic' interiors." Enduringly popular, symmetrical arrangements make perfect practical, as well as design, sense: a bed flanked by bedside tables; armchairs either side of a fireplace. But, since pure symmetry can have a whiff of old-fashioned formality about it, designers favour a flexible take.

"At its most extreme," says Alan Hughes, vice principal of Inchbald School of Design, "symmetry is duplication. If you design a room where you can put a line down the middle and each side is the same, there's a hotel feel to that. You can create order and balance without going that far."



## THE GROUND RULES

"People often think symmetry means using even numbers, but working with odd numbers feels more natural. It's a bit like planting bulbs: groups of three and five look better than two or four," says Alan Hughes. Jenny Gibbs advises, "Identify the room's focal point and find a balance. With a fireplace, if you put a table on one side, you want something on the other and, unless it's of similar visual weight, you feel uncomfortable." Iris Dunbar says, "The architecture gives you an ordered framework, so think of the room's shape as your starting point."

### SMALL OR AWKWARDLY SHAPED ROOMS

"You can 'correct' an awkwardly shaped room with symmetrical touches," says Alan Hughes. "Narrow rooms with a fireplace on one of the longer walls can be made to look more square if you match the colours on the two narrow walls." In a small room, you can instil a

greater sense of order by using a strong symmetrical pattern such as wide floorboards or black and white tiles on the floors, or a repeat-geometric patterned wallpaper. "To preserve the feeling of uncluttered calm, keep the furnishings simple," says Iris Dunbar.

## SPECIAL ADVICE FOR EVERY ROOM



### THE DINING ROOM

"A lot of interior space is symmetrical for functional reasons. The dining room is typically rectangular in shape so you choose a rectangular table to fit. You can emphasise the length with interesting chairs to focus the eye on the dining table," says Iris Dunbar.



### THE LIVING ROOM

"I think balance is the key word here. It doesn't have to be two three-seater sofas and a coffee table at right angles to the fireplace," says Alan Hughes. "Work in an odd number of cushions, and use throws and decorative objects to skew up the symmetry slightly."



### THE BEDROOM

"This is the natural home of symmetry, with a centrally placed bed and bedside tables. It is a brave person who puts a bed at an angle, but order can be monotonous, so a chaise longue placed across a corner of the room will help to break it up," says Jenny Gibbs.



### THE ENTRANCE HALL

"Long narrow spaces such as an entrance hall benefit from symmetrically placed mirrors. A repetitive use of these along the length will create an ordered, comfortable feel," suggests Jenny Gibbs. Wide floorboards optically enlarge the space. ■