

Designers Debate

Star Power

Two designers agree on prioritizing function in a room—but diverge on the importance of creating a focal point.

AS TOLD TO KAITLIN PETERSEN



Center of Attention

CARMEN RENÉ SMITH

Aquilo Interiors, Oakland, California

I believe there should be multiple focal points in a well-designed space to create depth and interest, where every corner of a client's home tells a unique story that reflects who they are. Our job as designers is to create those stars of the room, then make sure each one shines.

For example, I recently designed a pool house that doubles as an office. On one side, there's a striking fireplace and bar area with custom cabinetry in a deep blue palette adorned with bold floral wallpaper. Textured plaster walls extend to a pitched ceiling in red cedar, creating a captivating focal point that commands attention. On the other side of the room, a "Murphy desk" folds down from the wall into a workspace for the client—a secondary focal point that complements the fireplace while reveling in its own stardom. The art piece that transforms into a low-hanging feature when the desk is open adds another layer of personality to the space. These unexpected details inject character and fun into a design, making it more inviting and memorable.

A room without a focal point is like a story without a climax: It's missing that exhilarating moment that draws you in. My designs are akin to the *Lord of the Rings* saga, with a multitiered climax of fun and dynamic moments. Think of it as the *pièce de résistance*, or the conversation starter that weaves the entire space together. Why settle for anything less than epic and extraordinary rooms?

VERSUS

In Perfect Harmony

DUVÁL REYNOLDS

DuVál Design, Fairfax, Virginia



Spaces are meant to be lived in, not observed. While a focal point can be captivating, but it's no substitute for a thoughtfully-designed space. My goal is to create an effortless look that doesn't feel like we're trying to distract from the room's purpose. Keeping our focus on harmony and balance sets the stage for our clients to thrive.

We always start with the floor plan and function. After understanding the requirements of the space, we create a palette of three foundational colors. We can deviate from there—I love the use of well-placed colors and patterns, so we spend a lot of time situating these around the room so that the addition feels cohesive. This doesn't mean that a room has to be boring and lackluster: In this client's living room, we introduced layers of texture, saturated accent colors, and plenty of pattern play without establishing a single star—an approach that helps the room feel more inviting.

The client we design for want to maximize the use of their home. Our focus is not just about making something pretty, but also about building a space for memories to be made. I love having a focal point in the room, but personally, I believe it should be the family who's living there. Let's make sure our designs shine with the homeowner's story—after all, our clients are the real stars of the home! ■



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