

What's the point?

As Brian Cotsen explains, how we feel about a room depends on where we're looking

Whether you are planning on sprucing up a room or introducing a whole new scheme, finding its focal point and developing the decor around it is the key to success.

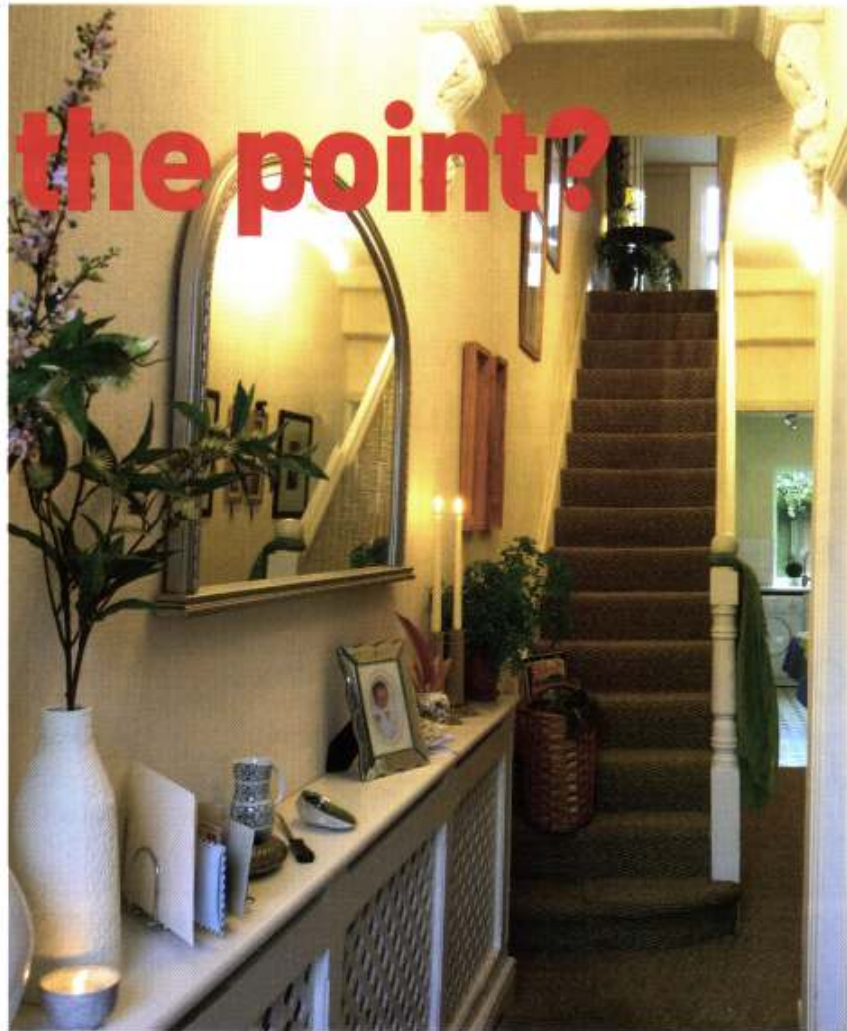
But what is a 'focal point' and how do you find where it is in the room? The focal point is the object or area towards which, on entering a space for the first time, your eyes naturally gravitate. Developing this area not only gives a room a central focus, but also gives anyone who enters the room something to focus on, pause and relax. It can be very subtle, often the viewer does not notice it, but subconsciously it can have a significant effect.

A room will feel so much more inviting and be a far more comfortable space to rest or entertain in if the orientation of the room is towards its focal point. This could be an architectural feature such as a fireplace, archway, staircase, or unusual structure within the room. It may be a piece of art or a striking floor-standing sculpture; perhaps a display cabinet that is lit and full of beautiful china. It might even be a fabulous chandelier. Sometimes it is the view beyond the room that is the focal point – a beautiful full-length window that looks out onto a lovely garden or an attractive and interesting view.

The focal point can also be an important piece of furniture – one that defines a room's purpose – a bed, for example.

The important thing is to learn how to find a room's focal point and to ensure that it is made central focus of the room scheme. An important point to keep in mind is that there should be just one 'dominant' focal point, though there can be many other things to look at. Too many focal points will create a distressing sense of clutter and the room loses any impact.

You may have a room that is fairly blank, with no distinguishing features to it. In this case think about the largest pieces of furniture that you are putting into it – a four-poster bed, a sofa, a beautiful dining table, a roll-top bath?



Eyes left: The addition of a large mirror and a decorative radiator cover (above) transforms this dark, dingy and uninviting hallway.



The other furniture, and the axis of the room, should be oriented towards that main focal point. In a sitting room you would group the seating towards the centre of the room and the fireplace. Use other accessories to draw attention to the focal point; dress a mantle with

attractive objects to bring more attention to the fireplace or try adding a large over-mantle mirror. In the summer you might reorientate the room towards the window and the view beyond. Focal points can actually be objects that change, such as a wonderful vase of flowers on a central hall table.

You can create an instant focal point in featureless rooms by decorating the main wall, or even the central portion of the main wall, differently from the rest of the room, using paint or striking wallpaper for instance.

Use light to highlight your chosen focal point. Use picture lights or directional spots to pick out your chosen item. Think about how much more inviting a fireplace containing a real flame is that one that is not in use.

There are many unsightly things we live with on an everyday basis: it's important not to let them become the centre of attention in a room scheme. Distracting the eye, screening them off or using clever storage allows you and your visitors to sit back and enjoy a room with a whole new 'look'.

'The Property Coach' carries out consultations and property staging. Get the FREE 10-part course 'Home Staging your property Successfully. For more information, call 020 7388 0242 or visit www.property-coach.co.uk