



Courtesy of Fein Zalkin Interiors

An area rug needs to be large enough so furniture can sit on it completely, or the pieces will be unstable.

BY JANA SOELDNER DANGER  
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**M**any of today's homes and condos have open floor plans. They have advantages, but with fewer walls dividing and defining spaces, decorating can be challenging. With thought and planning, however, it's not hard to create cozy, stylish living areas.

"Open floor plans are extremely popular," said Nina Haas, an interior designer in Miami. "People love them. They give the feeling of more square footage. In a smaller home, if you take down a wall, it gives you the feeling of more space. They're also more social. If you're in the kitchen cooking, you can still be part of what's going on."

"The space is more flexible," said Jaime Blomquist, an interior designer in Fort Lauderdale. "You're also not wasting space with hallways, and they allow natural light to come in. The goal is that as you approach the front door, you want to see the great room and all the way to the back patio, and incorporate the outside space with the inside so the interior looks bigger."

"One reason open floor plans are popular is that nobody's really doing formal entertaining anymore, especially younger people," said Josh Fein, an interior designer with Fein Zalkin Interiors in Aventura. "Things are becoming more casual. Open plans also enhance the views. You can see them from every area."

**DRAWBACKS**

Of course, there are some drawbacks. "There are people who don't like them," Haas said. "They say the kitchen is noisy and they have to keep it clean constantly. They want the kitchen to be a place of preparation and staging. You also lose storage space because the top cabinets are gone."

**DEFINING LIVING AREAS**

Whether the open floor plan is in a single-family home or a condo, be careful about blocking views. "We're doing more recessed lighting rather than chandeliers or hanging lights because we don't want to obstruct the view and close the space," Fein

said. In condos with cement ceilings, Fein often installs a dropped ceiling to accommodate the recessed lighting. "The loss of height is minimal, and it's not as important as the lighting," he said.

"Put in a fixture that's high, or a chandelier you can see through so it doesn't stop your eye," Haas said. "There are a lot of options available."

Different areas of the large space, usually a great room that is a combined living and dining room, plus an open kitchen, should be coordinated.

"Rooms that were enclosed could be completely different from each other," Fein said. "But when it's an open area, the spaces need to relate to each other and tell a story. Otherwise, it looks choppy, and that defeats the whole purpose of an open floor plan."

One way to do it is with color. "Color plays a very big role," Fein said. "If there's a color in the living and dining areas, you can pick it up in the kitchen. People are getting bolder with color."

"You can define an area with paint," Haas said. "Create a feature wall on an existing wall in a strong color and continue it in smaller ways."

Define a space with a feature wall using large-format tile or stone, Blomquist said. She suggests being careful with strong colors. "You want everything to be neutral so your eye flows through the space," she said. "Add color with accessories."

Different living areas can be defined with furniture groupings, area rugs and light fixtures such as a chandelier that anchors a dining table. "Even in an open space, people need to understand that this area is the living room and that one is the dining room," Haas said. "Decide where the different areas will be. Decide where the TV will be, and start with what's comfortable for you. Create little rooms within that open space by creating sitting areas and bringing in a fluffy area rug."

**FLOATING**

With fewer walls, furniture needs to be placed in open areas, a technique called floating. "We're floating all our furniture now," Fein said. "I can't remember the last time we put a piece of furniture up against a wall, except for wall units and beds. Float-

**Decorating an open floor plan can be challenging**



Courtesy of Jaime Blomquist Interiors

In an open floor plan, recessed lighting and clear fixtures that hang high avoid obstructing the flow of the view.

ing doesn't limit you — your sofa or buffet don't have to be a certain size to fit against a particular wall. You can do more with your furniture, because a wall doesn't have to anchor it."

It offers more options. "You can get an L-shaped sofa, a modular or a curved one," Haas said.

Think about how particular spaces will be used and furnish them accordingly. "Create conversation areas," Blomquist said.

A large island can serve as a separation between the kitchen and the great room. It can even eliminate the need for a bar or a breakfast table. "Islands

have become a very fun element," Fein said. "They're not a piece of furniture, but they're being used as one. We find our clients are gathering around the island and having cocktails."

While scale is always important, it is especially so with an open floor plan. "Pay attention to scale," Blomquist said. "People don't do that very well."

"You don't want furniture to be too small for the open space," Fein said. On the other hand, it's important that furnishings aren't so large they are overwhelming or don't fit well. Remember that there

needs to be enough room to walk around the furniture. Before you go shopping, carefully measure the different areas and lay them out. "You can use an old-fashioned measuring tape and blue painter's tape," Fein said. "You want to lay it out very precisely. The biggest mistake people make is buying the wrong product that won't work in the space."

Area rugs also need to be the right size. "The rug is the anchor of the space," Fein said. "Be sure there's the right amount of rug coming out the back of the sofa and enough on the sides for the end tables. Make sure the dining chairs can be pulled out. If furniture isn't totally on or off the rug, it won't be stable."



Courtesy of Jaime Blomquist Interiors

An open kitchen allows the cook to be part of what's going on in other living areas.



Courtesy of Fein Zalkin Interiors

Scale is important in an open floor plan. Furniture should not be so small the space engulfs it, but it should not be so large it is overwhelming or doesn't fit into the space it is meant for.



Courtesy of Fein Zalkin Interiors

Floating furniture in an open floor plan allows flexibility. A sofa, for example, does not have to fit into a space against a wall.



Courtesy of Fein Zalkin Interiors

A strong color in one living area can be picked up in another to coordinate spaces.



José María Serrano, CCIM  
2019 Chairman of the Board  
MIAMI Association of Realtors

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Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) is the largest and arguably most acclaimed urban school district in the United States. MDCPS is home to 392 schools and 345,000 students. District students speak 56 different languages and represent 160 countries. Miami Dade County Public Schools receive more National Magnet Schools of Merit Awards than any other school district nationally.

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Nineteen South Florida high schools ranked among the 31 top schools in Florida with the most students among the 2015-17 graduating classes of Harvard, Princeton and MIT, according to PolarisList. Ivy league diplomas are a strong indicator of future success.

The top-two high schools in Florida with the most Ivy League grads are in Broward County, and five of the top-10 are in South Florida counties: #1 Pine Crest School (private-Fort Lauderdale); #2 Cypress Bay High School (public-Weston); #2(tie) Ransom Everglades School (private-Miami); #7 St. Thomas Aquinas High School (private-Fort Lauderdale); and #8 Miami Palmetto Senior High School (public-Miami).

Eight of the 10 best private schools in Florida are located in South Florida counties, according to the 2019 rankings by Niche.com: #1 Pine Crest School (Fort Lauderdale); #2 Ransom Everglades School (Miami); #3 American Heritage School (Plantation); #4 American Heritage School (Delray Beach); #5 Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart (Miami); #6 Gulliver Preparatory School (Miami); #8 NSU University School (Davie) and #9 David Posnack Jewish Day School (Davie).

**Robust Colleges, Universities**

Greater Miami ranks as the eighth-largest "college town" in the nation because of its 438,000 full-time and part-time students. Florida International University in Miami ranked as the No. 2 public university in the state, according to the Florida Board of Governors in 2018. The University of Miami ranked as the 53rd best university in the nation, according to U.S. News & World Report rankings for 2019.

José María Serrano, CCIM  
New Miami Realty Corp.  
(305) 635-5000  
jserrano@newmiamiirealty.com

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