



DAWN HEARN, PHOTO BY TRE DUNHAM

COFFEE TABLES NOW

By CHERYL VAN TUYL JIVIDEN

You need one that is certain, in fact a room can look quite unfinished without one, but choosing the right coffee table for the job and how to style it, requires thought and consideration.

SIZE RIGHT

Measurement and proportion can ensure functionality whether in a family or living room, says Austin Interior Designer Dawn Hearn. “Leaving approximately 18 inches of clear space between the coffee table and adjacent seating pieces looks good, allows room to walk between and is still close enough to be accessible for use when seated. A rule-of-thumb for the size of your table is two-thirds the length of your sofa. Keeping the coffee table at the same height of your upholstered cushion height is ideal. Try to keep the table within a couple of inches below or above the height of your sofa cushions.”

While coffee tables and seat heights are fairly standard between 17 and 21 inches high, says Megan Clark of CasaPosh in Austin, she believes you can play with different heights to create different vibes in your space. “A low couch paired with a low, legless coffee table is going to have a very lounge-like, casual feel that invites people to get comfy and put their feet up. A more formal space may have a coffee table that sits a bit higher than the couch seat to ensure the safety of the delicate items that may sit on it.”

FORM & FUNCTION

Clark provides additional guidance on functionality. “The coffee table should be the point that the sitting area orbits around both physically and functionally. In order to create a space that is inviting for conversation and gathering, you want

people to have enough personal space to lounge on the available seating, but you also need enough common space that is shared and easily reached by all. The coffee table is that common ground. This should be taken into consideration when selecting the appropriate size table for a living space. The area should be intimate enough to carry on a conversation across the coffee table, and each seating area should be positioned with access to the central table.”

If the space gets too large, says Clark, start to create another grouping. “For large, open floor plans, you may need to make several different sitting areas that follow this same philosophy. Give each area a purpose directed by the table that it orbits around. Pub tables, coffee tables, game tables, dining tables... they all define the common purpose for the people sitting in that area. Sometimes in spaces with a very large sectional, you may try using a collection of tables of

different heights. This allows you a more abstract way to address the outreach of the table.”

DESIGN & STYLE

Once you have the size and functionality sorted out, you’ll want to consider design and style. Today there are many choices available that are on trend. “The biggest thing I see happening right now is that people are seeing the potential for these pieces to be artistic focal points in the room. Coffee tables are commanding attention right now with metallic surfaces, sculptural bases and dramatic stone tops. Heavily distressed wood surfaces are also being shown on contemporary bases for a sort of unexpected elegance,” says Clark. Hearn agrees. “The trends in coffee tables run the gamut of materials: acrylic, petrified wood, brass and glass, large upholstered ottomans.”



CASAPOSH, PHOTO BY CHRISTINA WELCH

Many designers have go-to styles that are ideal for multiple design needs. Clark’s favorite coffee tables are Cubos by World’s Away. “They are 21-inch square, antique-mirrored cubes that I use in groupings to create several different looks in a variety of sizes. I love using them to change up surface texture in a space and add a splash of elegance. Mirrored surfaces work well with most styles and tend to make any space look more dynamic by bouncing light around. For families with children, I tend to select coffee tables with reclaimed wood tops. These distressed styles tend to hide the wear and tear and tend to have softly worn edges and that is important for families of little bitty ones.” For versatility, Hearn has a clear choice. “A clean-lined Parsons coffee table blends with most styles and allows a simple base for you to decorate with accessories that reflect your style.”

DECORATE & ACCENT

Coffee tables offer a surface to decorate and enhance the room decor. But there are guidelines to help you find beauty and balance.

Hearn recommends:

- Don’t put anything too high on the coffee table as you want to be able to see across the room to the T.V. or others seated in the room.
- Books are always good on coffee tables.
- A tray helps consolidate things on the table and keeps it looking organized.
- Curiosities, collections and flowers are classic items to display.

She follows her own recommendations at home. “Our coffee table displays several stacks of books, a large decorative bowl, a collection of antique Indian brass bells and a couple of small bamboo boxes.”



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CASAPOSH, PHOTO BY LANDERS PHOTOGRAPHY

Clark says her favorite accessories to put on a coffee table are fairly basic. As for her own coffee table, “I like mixing textural extremes for a dramatic effect. Our home is contemporary black and white against rustic brown woods, accessorized with elegant crystal chandeliers, Lucite and of course, a touch of gold. My coffee table decor summarizes that vibe. The table is a simple rectangular Lucite silhouette that spans the long end of our sectional. I have a black and white Tom Ford book on it, a white orchid in a contemporary ceramic pot, a set of black snakeskin coasters with nail heads and a favorite vintage brass horse sculpture that I found while thrifting.”

Clark’s things to consider:

- Being the hub of your sitting area, the coffee table speaks volumes to your guests about your personal style and interests.
- A set of neat coasters can capture the essence of their space.
- A statue of some sort and a live element of greenery add height. ❖

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