

# Inner Space

By Meredith Ericksen | Photography courtesy of Tuscan Blue Design



1 These artistically framed, antique tiles above the fireplace became the focal point and the inspiration for the soft-green color palette in this family room.

## THE FIRST FIVE Design Decisions and Dilemmas

**When starting almost every interior design project, I address five common “design decisions” first.** And you can, too. Making the right design decisions about “The First Five” before you do anything else often makes the difference between success and surrender.

**1. Start with inspiration.** We all need a direction to follow. Designing a space requires a place to start, an inspiration. Maybe you’ll discover an amazing architectural style, or find a colorful mosaic tile that you can use as an accent. You might find inspiration in that red stove that becomes a focal point in your new kitchen, or in a favorite area rug or family collection like your grandmother’s silver ... just find something that will inspire you to create the space.

**2. Consider space planning.** This is where I begin my design for any room—sketching with a scale and paper, taking measurements, laying out the space. With open-concept floor

plans, it is often difficult to create a comfortable and cozy room. Begin with the basic room layout; organize the space by creating “zones” for different functions; think about how people will use the space, how they need to move through the space; and finally, consider how the furniture layout/selection can perfect the organization of the room.

**3. Create a focal point.** The focal point draws a visitor into the room. This could be a beautiful picture window or a fireplace. As you begin to work through the design, you might find that the focal point is also the inspiration of the room (see point 1) and generates the space plan.

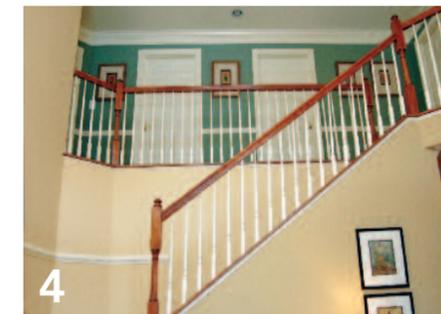
Sometimes a room has no distinguishing features, and you have to create one. This is the perfect opportunity to use something you cherish: an accent piece of furniture, a table with a collection of interesting pieces on it, a dramatic mirror or a fabric panel.

**Right (no. 2):** A long, narrow room with three entrances demanded careful space planning to create a fireside reading spot, a TV viewing space and a family gathering area. **Below, right (no. 3):** Simple bookshelves and art created a much needed focal point for this space.

**4. Integrate color.** “Beige is boring” is a bold statement, especially since many people are perfectly happy with beige. But I think color adds personality and style to a space. The repetition of a single color found in a fabric or area rug will link spaces together. Remember that colors like earthy green, soft taupe and blue-gray are considered neutrals ... so don’t be afraid to use them.

Wall color is one of the last items I select in a design. I consider rugs, fabrics, artwork and accessories and find a color in those pieces that will tie them together. I often start with the “historic” paint colors—concentrated yet soft colors. One great tip is to use a softer white when painting trim; this enhances the color on your walls.

**5. Don’t forget architectural details.** Adding architectural details to a space is one of the most effective ways to craft a custom, finished look. For a transitional-style room, use a simple cove molding instead of a traditional crown molding. When you are designing a focal point, think about the architectural details: Redesign your fireplace mantel in the style of the room, or replace an old fireplace surround with a colorful mosaic tile. Think about the ceilings: Add a panel molding to create a border, add small beams, or lower an overwhelming two-story ceiling by adding coffers.



**Above (no. 4):** Carrying the tones of blue from the foyer through the family room and the breakfast room gives this first floor renovation a cohesive look. **Left (no. 5):** A variety of architectural details enhance this family room renovation. But the addition of small ceiling beams defines the fireplace focal point.

Remember: If you begin your design project with “The First Five,” you will increase your chances of achieving success ... and not surrender. But if you find yourself ready to surrender, give me a call! ☎

Designer Meredith Ericksen is an allied member of the American Society of Interior Designers and owner of Tuscan Blue Design. Ericksen shares these tips for overcoming the five most common challenges in interior design from her extensive experience with residential and commercial design. [www.tuscanbluedesign.com](http://www.tuscanbluedesign.com)