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Pictures on Your Walls
Michigan State University
Cooperative Extension Service
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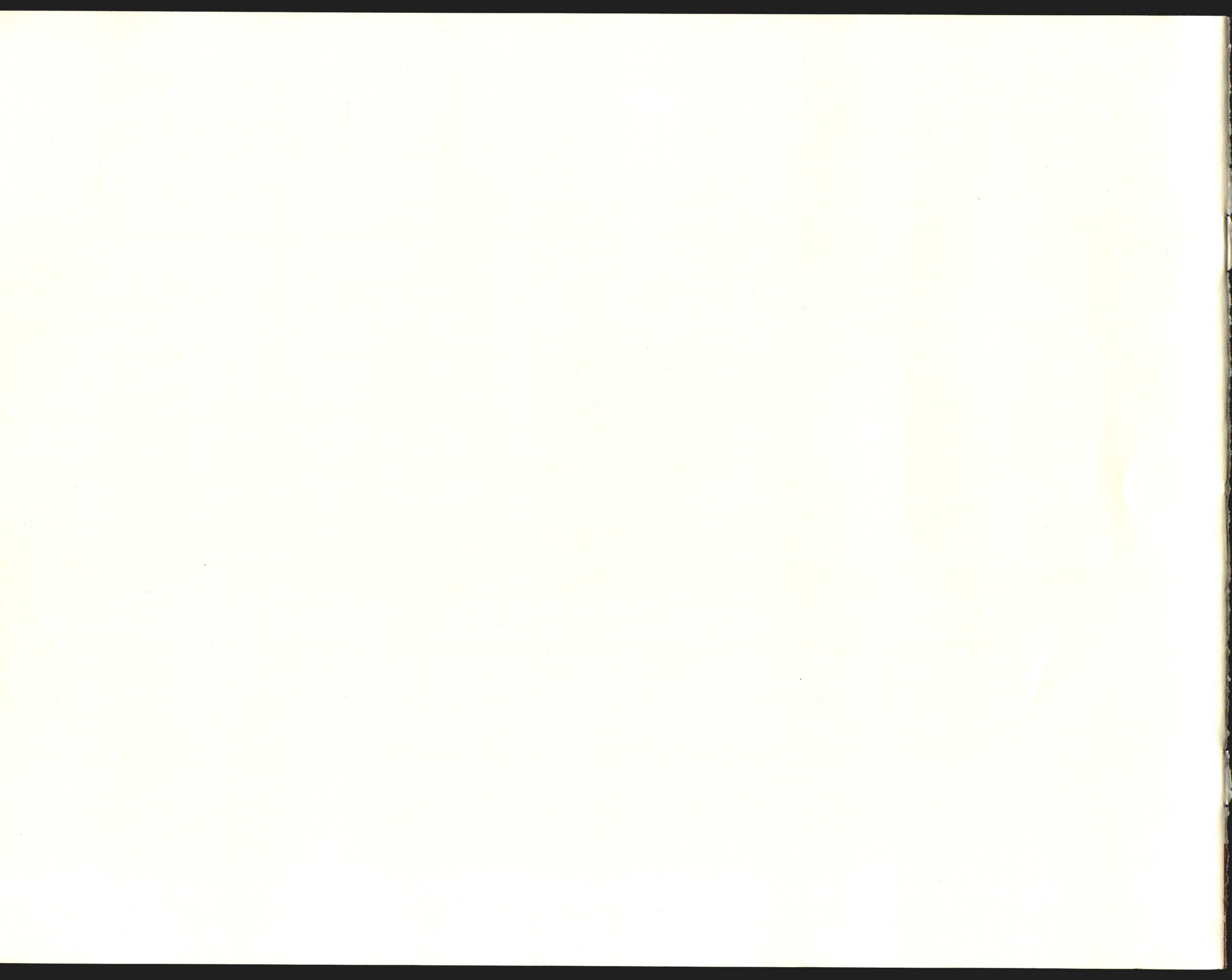
PICTURES ON YOUR WALLS

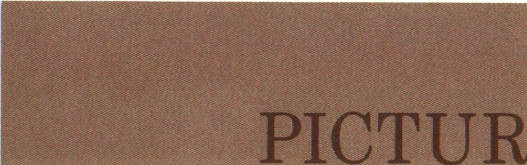


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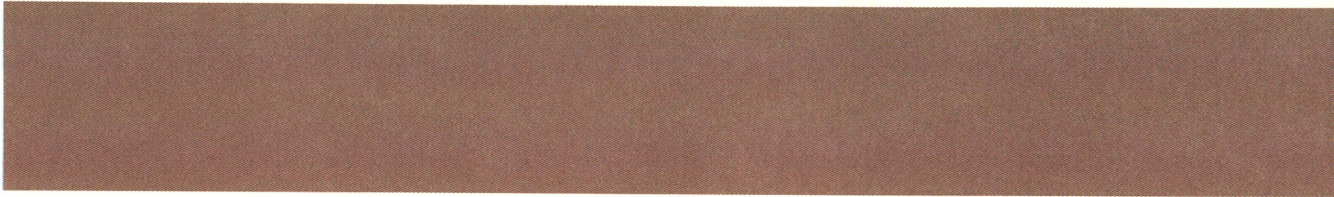




PICTURES... some generations hang them above the plate molding; others hang them at eye level; the moderns stand them on the floor and Michelangelo put his on the ceiling. Times do change and so do people's ideas about many things, including where to place pictures in the home.

Set rules fall short. Does "eye level" mean when standing or seated, and whose eye level is used; the 5 foot 3 inch woman or the 6 foot man? But haphazard hanging of pictures on nails already in the wall is as bad a way to hang pictures.

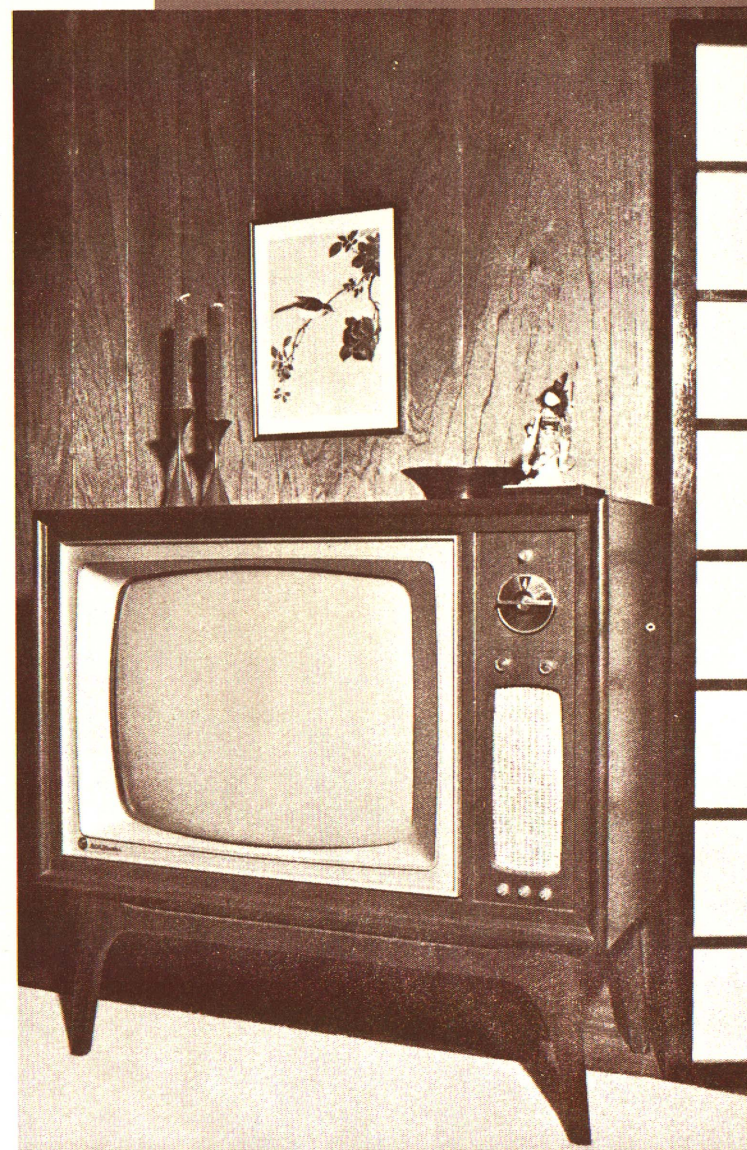
Deciding where to place pictures is the ability to see them as one part of the whole interior design of the room. Pictures serve no other purpose than to give pleasure. However, this visual comfort is as necessary as is physical comfort of a chair or sofa. And a good picture, poorly placed, is as annoying as a comfortable chair with the seat cushion missing. These 8 Guides for Picture Placement suggest ways to consider the pictures you have so you can decide whether they contribute to the interior design of your home in the way you intend.

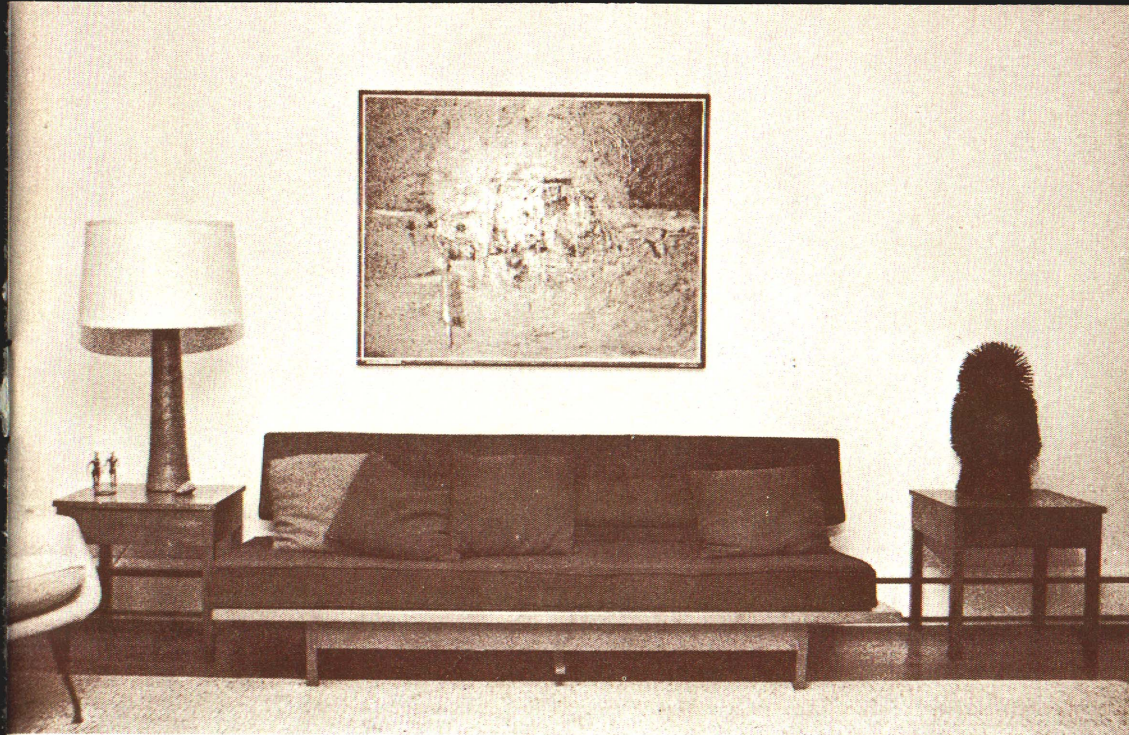


GUIDE 1. PICTURES SHOULD BE PART OF A FURNITURE GROUP.

The space furniture or fireplace forms against the wall is the setting. It may be a single table, the television or a grouping of sofa, end tables and lamps. In your mind, extend lines up from the outer edges and over from the top edge, if there is a lamp or other furniture that gives height. When most of the picture is within the space formed by the imaginary lines, it is part of the group. Pictures placed outside are uncomfortable to look at — the cushion is missing!

Boundary lines of the wall space are the top of the screen and the left edge of the television. The print placed within them is necessary to complete the design arrangement.





The top of the picture is the highest edge in this furniture group, but the major portion of the picture is within the space formed on the wall by the lamp-sofa-end table arrangement.

Occasionally, pictures can be very essential to the design of a room without being part of a furniture group. A small gallery has been arranged by a painter using several paintings, including his daughter, the dog and favorite family scenes.



GUIDE 2. SHAPE AND PLACEMENT OF PICTURES EFFECT SHAPE OF WALL SPACE.

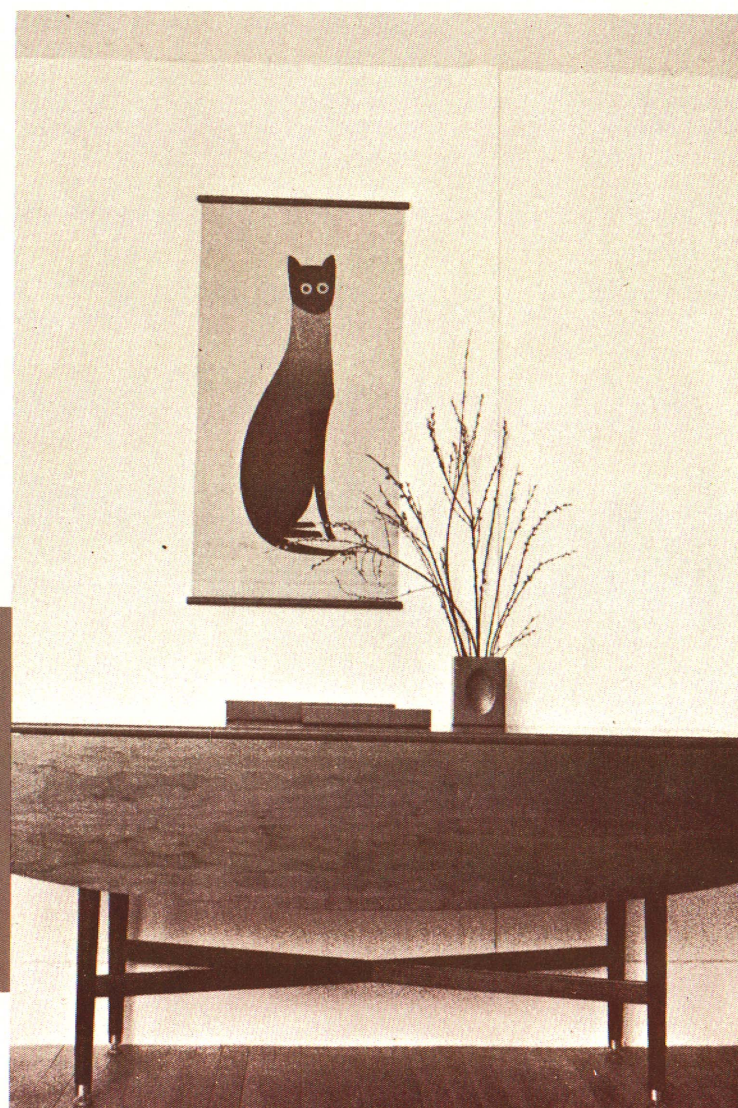
Wall spaces tend toward a square, a vertical rectangle or a horizontal rectangle. When a picture or a grouping of pictures repeats the general shapes of the space on which they will be placed, the whole design looks more integrated. However, the effect of the wall shape can be modified by using a different picture shape. This happens because the eye follows the direction of the picture, either crosswise or upward.



A large picture repeats the fireplace shape, and emphasizes the rectangular shape. Its placement breaks the line of the paneling, but because it is strong and colorful, this is not too disturbing.

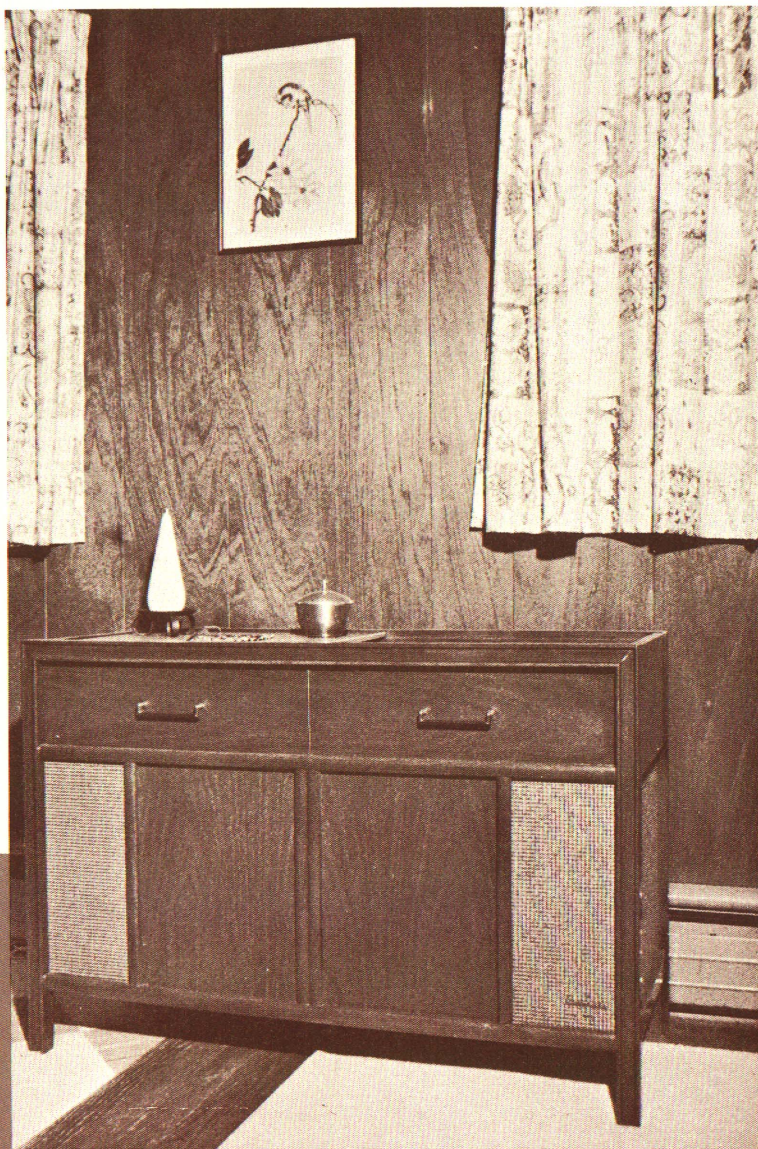
This charming vertical flower print by great-grandmother emphasizes the vertical wall shape and gives a narrow space the look of an expert's touch.

Instead of repeating the horizontal wall shape, the hanging leads the eye up, giving height to the grouping. When a marked change in shape is used, it is most successful when placed off center, as is done with the wall hanging. The vase of pussy willows broadens the lower part of the arrangement and draws the eye crosswise along the table.



GUIDE 3. HEIGHT OF PICTURE ABOVE FURNITURE AFFECTS OVER-ALL APPEARANCE.

All of us are more apt to have placement too high than too low. The old rule of eye level sounded good but was really just a trick answer. An inch or two up or down isn't particularly important but relating picture to furniture below is important.



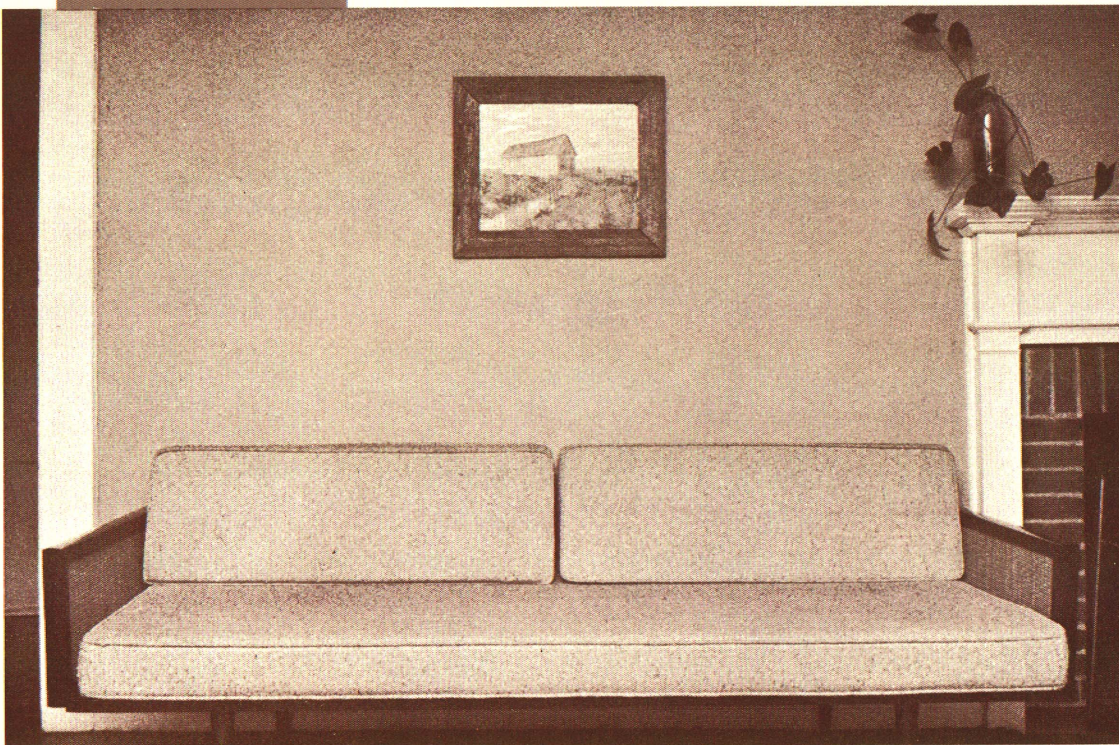
The too-high print over stereo-phonograph gives a spotty, disjointed look to arrangement. It looks as though a nail was already in the wall at the point where the picture hangs.

A companion print hung below gives a decorative arrangement. The shape of the prints together repeats the shape of the fabric panels on the stereo. If only one print were used, its placement should be where the lower one is. A good example of this is shown under Guide 1 — a similar print used over the television.

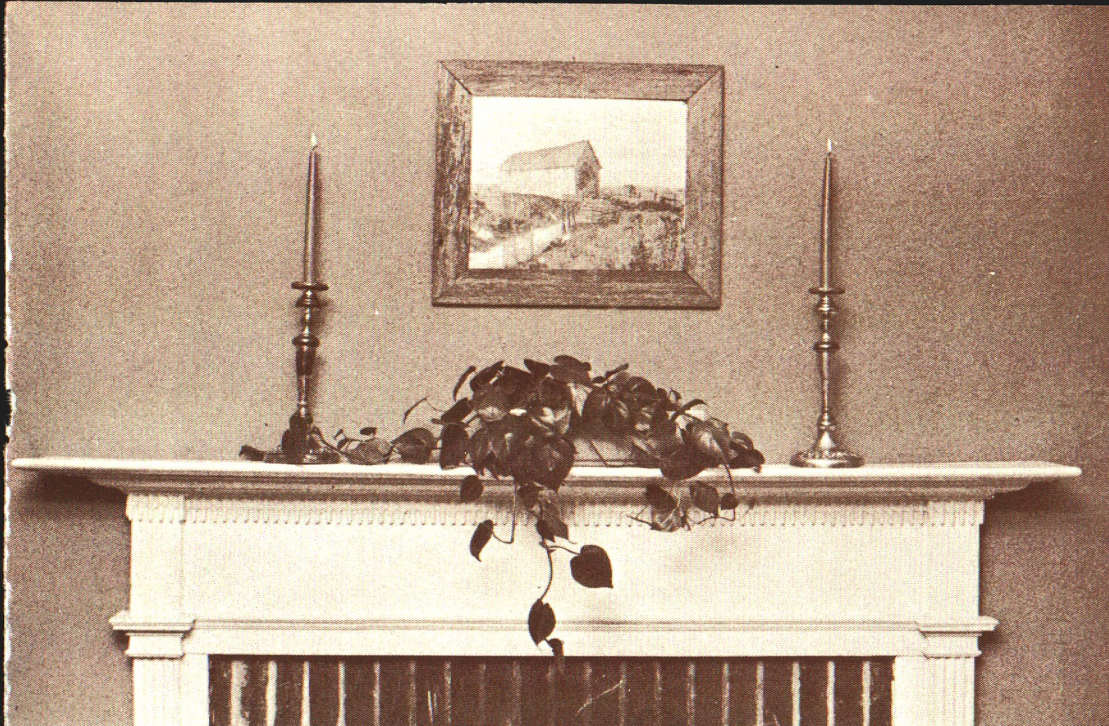


Low pieces of furniture require lower placement of pictures. Here, rather than forcing people to bend to see the picture, there is more space between table top and picture than would be the case if the table were taller. But the flower arrangement extends up into the frame tying the furniture grouping together.

GUIDE 4. PICTURES AND FURNITURE SHOULD BE IN SCALE. Scale means that the size of the picture and the size of the furniture are in proportion. A small picture in a large space looks lost and this is one of the more common misplacements of pictures. A picture in proportion gives a pleasant space relationship.

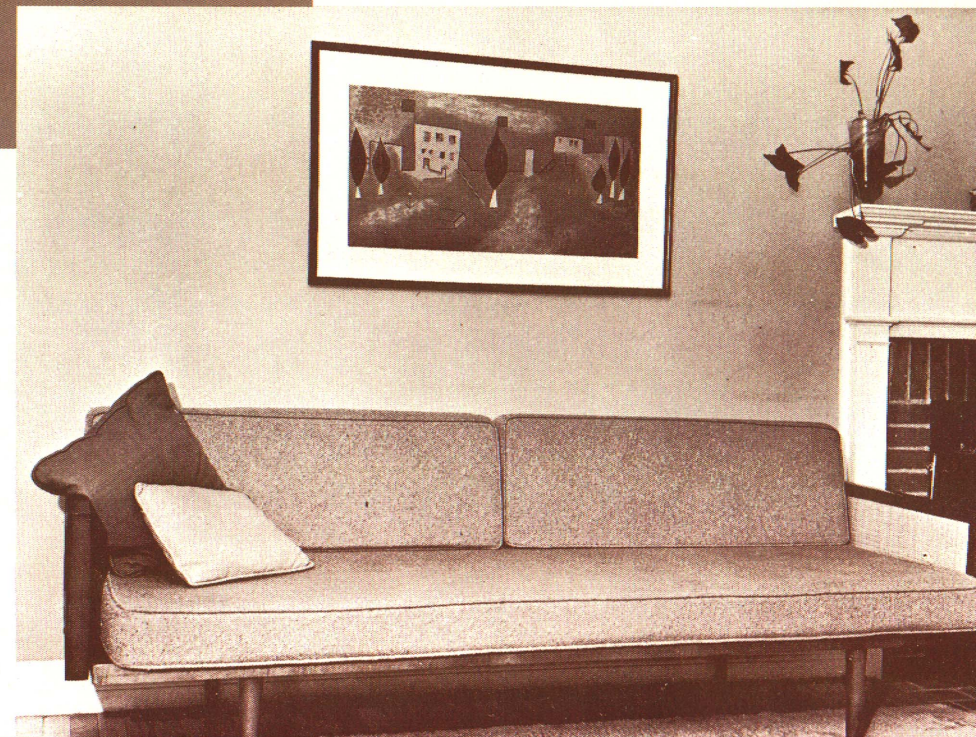


The small, square painting of a covered bridge is delightful. The frame is lumber from an old bridge. But its effectiveness is lost due to its placement over a large, long sofa. It is too small for the wall area and is the wrong shape for it.



When used over a mantel where the space is smaller and square, and when combined with candles and plant to give a larger-scaled arrangement, the picture becomes an important and eye-catching design in the room.

A larger, rectangular picture is much more satisfying over the sofa. The subject of a picture can be chosen to suit the family taste, but the size should be guided by the scale of the furniture.



GUIDE 5. GROUPING SEVERAL PICTURES GIVES NEEDED SCALE.

The eye connects small pictures that are grouped and sees them first as a large unit. Several pictures, too small to be in scale if used alone can give the needed proportion. They can be the same or different sizes and shapes.

Here is the same problem as shown in Guide 4 — a too-small picture for the furniture and the space. There is an unfinished look about this furniture grouping.



Two pictures grouped are large enough to be in scale with the sofa. In this case, they are hung to the left to balance the scroll on the other wall.



Three pictures, hung above the sofa in an orderly alignment, give the needed proportion to the furniture grouping. There is no longer the feeling that something is needed.

GUIDE 6. ALIGN PICTURES WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH FURNITURE LINES.

A good starting spot to hang any picture, unless it is centered, is to line it up with a line that is already present in the furniture group. In the case of picture groupings, they can be aligned with each other.



The outer edge of this picture is placed on the continuation of the line of the cabinet door. The eye automatically continues lines in the direction they are going, so this gives a very natural spot to see the edge of the picture.



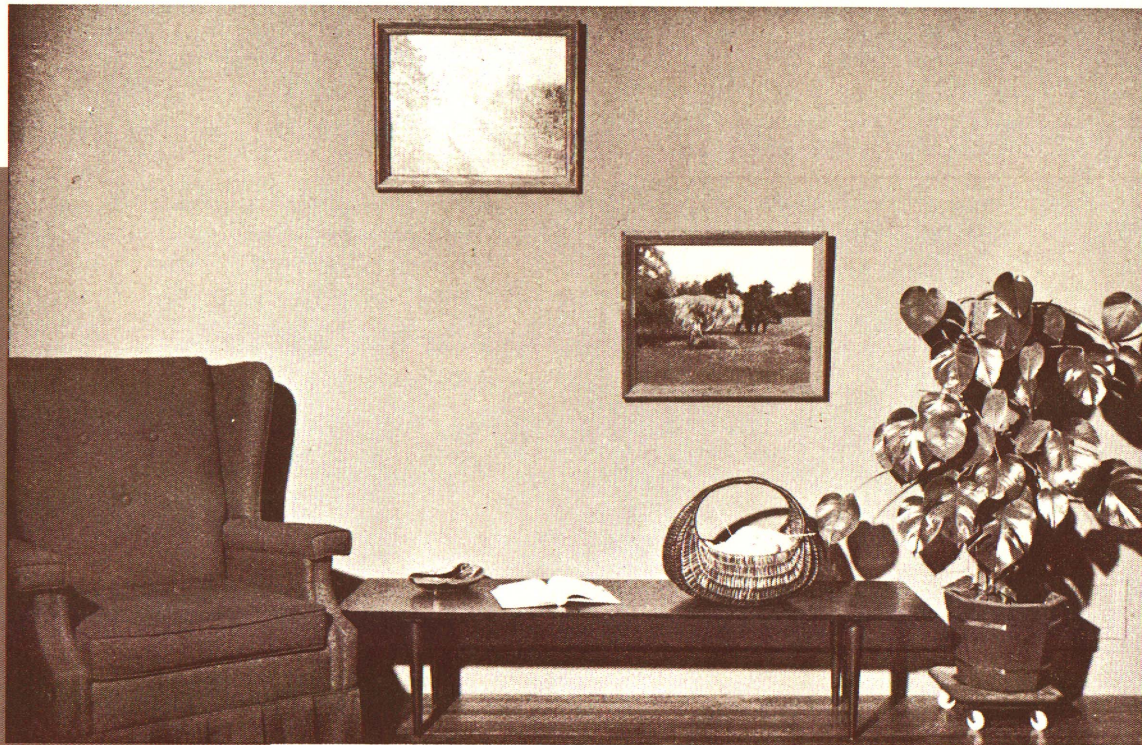
This seemingly casual grouping of pictures is actually very carefully aligned. The right edges of the two large pictures are on a line with the continuation of the cabinet door panel. The right inner edges of the three small pictures line up with the other side of the door panel. Each of the small pictures is aligned with a frame or mat line of the large pictures. The lower one was placed first, its top edge in line with the bottom edge of the upper large picture. The bottom of the lamp is in line with the narrow black line of the mat. This type of alignment takes skill, but the result is subtle and eye-satisfying.

The large picture is centered, the four small ones are neatly lined up with each other, so that the outer shape is a rectangle. The outside edges of this large rectangular shape line up with the right and left edges of the table. Because there is so much to look at in the prints, the straightforward arrangement is a good one.

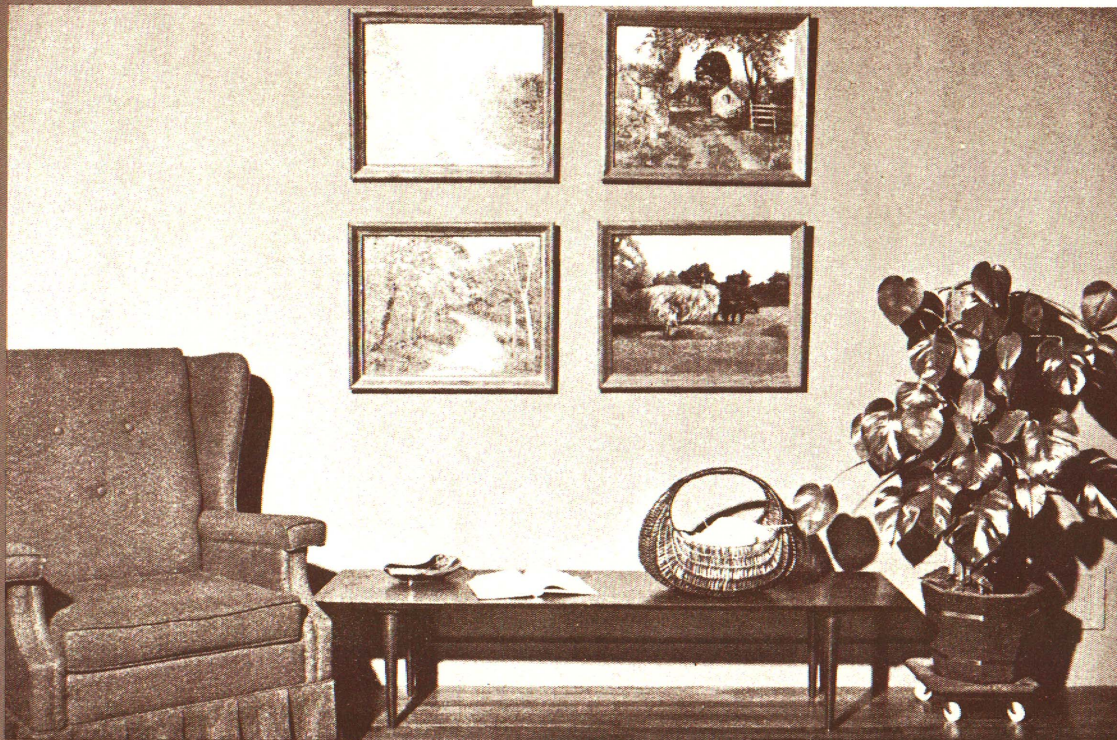


GUIDE 7. A "GROUND LINE" AT THE BOTTOM EDGE OF THE PICTURE GROUPINGS GIVES STABILITY.

Groups of pictures usually need to be placed so that they are in a line parallel to the floor. Staggered lines at the bottom of a row of pictures are disturbing because the eye stair-steps along the shapes and cannot enjoy the pictures. When placed up a stairwell, the ground line for pictures is a diagonal.



This unfortunate placement of two nice oil paintings does nothing for the furniture grouping, the pictures or the room. The eye is led out of the grouping, off in an angle beyond the chair.



Two more paintings are added and the four contribute to a total design unit of chair, low table and plant. Each depends on the other and none is complete without the rest.

Remove the plant and the furniture grouping is lopsided and uninteresting. In order for it to be a good design, the homemaker would have to start rearranging furniture and pictures.



GUIDE 8. BALANCE IS NECESSARY WHEN PLACING PICTURES.

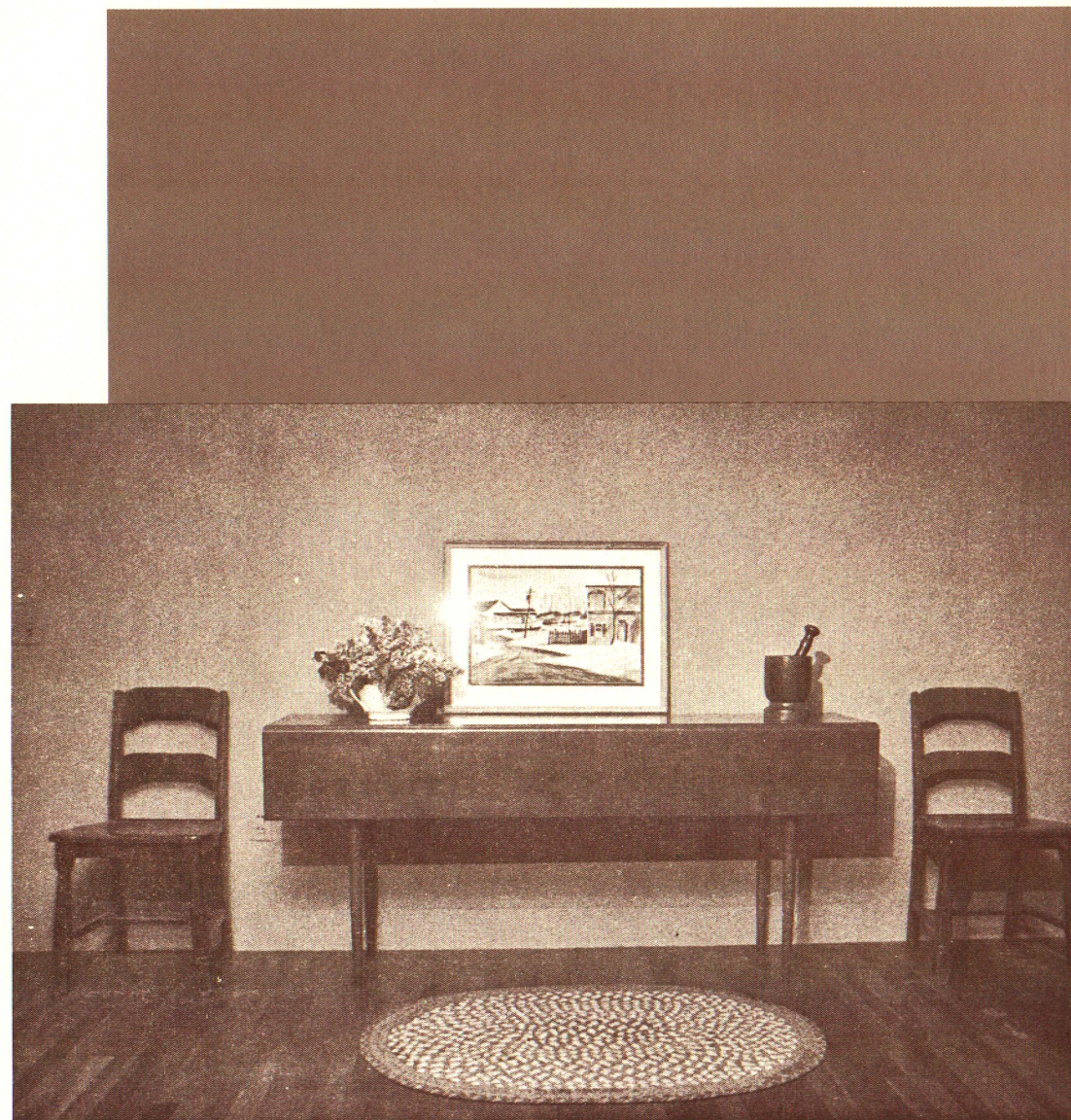
Balance was thrown off when the plant was removed in the third example under Guide 7. Balance is what is involved when the cat hanging and the two small prints over the sofa in Guide 5 were placed off-center. Formal balance comes when a picture is centered. Informal balancing of the lamp explains the reason the grouping of pictures in Guide 6 over the chest is so far off center. Balance means that there is enough weight on either side of the center to satisfy the eyes.



Informal balance over this desk is gained by first placing books and lamp in the practical spot for them, to the left, over the knee-hole. They are counterbalanced with the Japanese print and flowers. Notice how many of the other guides are put to use here.

Successful picture placement is basically working with the pictures you have and the space created on the wall by furniture to produce an interesting effect. In the homes of different people, many different results are possible from the same pictures, wall shapes and furnishings. And if the 8 Guides are followed, the finished design can be a good one. Exchanging and interchanging pictures can give variation from time to time if a single picture or grouping becomes tiresome. Many different shapes and sizes of pictures can be used on the same nail, particularly over a mantel or piece of furniture where other accessories can be placed.

A final point to cheer you on your way to better picture placement is this—pictures are placed so they relate to the furniture with which they are used. So not all pictures in the room will be hung at the same level with each other. This may seem strange at first thought, but basically, it is simply good interior design and good interior design is the purpose of pictures in the home.



This homemaker-painter has solved the problem of displaying her many charming paintings by not using a nail. Instead she leans whatever picture she happens to choose against the wall. When the dining table is in use, the picture is removed. This is a very flexible placement and sometimes a practical one.

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