

CREATE AN ARTFUL FOCAL POINT
If you have a beautiful mantel, don't hide it under piles of tchotchkes. Put up original art and arrange some fresh blooms.

GO LUXE
Ultrasuede, leather and chenille are wonderfully tactile, stay-clean materials.

designed for living

Family living rooms often end up on the wrong side of shabby chic. But Toronto-based designer Lara Neal created an elegant space where she and her hubby, Peter, can entertain adult friends one night, and watch their daughters Hannah, 8, Rebecca, 6, and Bridget, 4, perform an impromptu dance recital the next. Read on for her expert tips for a well-appointed living room everyone can live in – and love! >

WRITTEN & PRODUCED BY YUKI HAYASHI
PHOTOS BY ANDREAS TRAUTMANSDORFF

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Here are some of Lara Neal's tips for carving out an attractive living space that everyone can share.

- DO** designate food-free zones; the Neal girls eat in the dining room or kitchen.
- DON'T** rule out luxe materials – some are surprisingly low-maintenance. Leather wipes clean and pet hair vacuums right off; Ultrasuede resists stains – just blot up spills quickly. (Cotton and silk, meanwhile, are best saved 'til your kids are grown up.)
- DO** give kids their own storage baskets (use open ones for books and puzzles, lidded ones to hide a jumble of toys).
- DON'T** keep big toys in the living room (giant kiddie kitchen, anyone?) – that's what basements and kids' rooms are for.
- DO** use accessories like cushions and throws to instantly refresh the room each season.
- DON'T** get stuck; stick nylon glides on large pieces so you can easily move them.
- DO** avoid fussiness. "We've gone with clean lines because this isn't a huge living room," says Neal. Simpler is usually better.

STREAMLINE YOUR DECOR

- Choose smart pieces like...
- > ottomans (some styles open for storage)
 - > nesting tables
 - > side tables with drawers
 - > wall-mounted shelves
 - > armoires, cupboards
 - > trays, bins, baskets

▲ Neal tucked a pair of nesting tables between the club chairs that separate the living room from the adjoining dining room. The larger table provides a perch for her husband's morning coffee, and the smaller table beneath stores the kids' puzzles. (The tables can be split up and placed elsewhere in the room when entertaining.) While glass offers a timeless, expansive look, you might want to pass on it if your kids are in that wobbly-footed toddler phase. Pointy-cornered tables should be placed in room corners or niches between seats to minimize bumping, says Neal.

◀ Tucked into a living room corner, this old painted-wood cupboard provides additional storage for the dining room. Displayed on top are prized family photos and knick-knacks that were either handed down from relatives or picked up on vacation overseas.

Being a designer has its perks: Neal custom-designed her own sofa and ottoman. Custom furniture is a great option if you have a specific style or size you want and can't find it in stores. For info on the pieces in this story, see our shopping list. Find it! page 93.

NAVIGATE YOUR NEUTRAL TERRITORY

Nix stark white walls in favour of neutral beige; add verve with a feature wall in a strong colour. Punch up classic upholstery with bright or patterned cushions.

tip A neutral wool/nylon sisal rug helps hide dirt. "It's almost the same colour," says Neal. The best way to keep rugs looking fresh? Enforce a shoes-off policy.