



fireside chats

A gracious fireplace is the ideal focal point for a living room. Its architectural presence commands attention, its warmth is a comfort in cooler weather, and it provides a natural anchor for the main seating arrangement. An impressive feature, it also allows for several options when it comes to arranging furniture. Perhaps one of these three floor plan ideas will spark your own creative space planning. Written by Kimberley Seldon

1 formal The most formal arrangement is to place an identical pair of sofas perpendicular to the fireplace. That creates a strong, immediate impression and emphasizes the mantel's role as focal point. (Think of it as putting parentheses around an important thought.) To finish the conversation grouping, you might place two chairs facing the fireplace. Add a large area carpet, a central coffee table and end tables to complete the scene. If there's sufficient room, a pair of foot stools positioned directly in front of the fireplace would be great. They could be called into service during larger gatherings and will fill the visual void an empty fireplace leaves in the summertime. This classic floor plan works for traditional and contemporary interiors.

2 semiformal In similar though more casual fashion, position one sofa perpendicular to the fireplace but arrange a pair of chairs (rather than a second sofa) opposite. That works well if the chairs are placed between the living and dining room or entrance, as it may be preferable to look toward two chair backs and an interesting end table rather than toward a full sofa back. It's most common to upholster the chairs in a fabric that coordinates with the sofa, rather than match it exactly. To finish the conversation grouping, add two different chairs or perhaps a daybed or bench. The latter option leaves the view to the fireplace unimpeded and provides flexible seating – a person can face the mantel or turn his or her back to it. This setup is ideal if your living room is large enough to accommodate two separate seating areas.



3 casual For an even more casual arrangement, use only a combination of chairs, as in the photo. Here, the oversize chairs face each other, providing a tête-à-tête spot for the young couple who live in this home. The upholstered ottoman makes it the go-to spot for reading and relaxing. If more seating is required, you could have four chairs facing each other, with a bench facing the mantel – a flexible arrangement particularly suited to those who love to move furniture frequently. You might forgo a standard coffee table and opt for a taller games or library table. Although the taller table blocks the fireplace from view, it does provide a cosy perch near the hearth, an ideal spot for a comfortable dinner or a rousing game of cards.

the hearth in summer

5 ways to fill the fireplace during summer months:

- 1 Stack dry firewood tightly into a pyramid.
- 2 Fill the hearth and firebox with thick pillar candles of varying heights. Light them during a party.
- 3 Place a decorative fire screen front and centre.
- 4 Strategically position a pair of footstools in front.
- 5 Add a dried flower arrangement or small statue.

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