Interior Design
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Lecture - 6
Principles and Elements of Interior Design – Understanding Composition

Hello everyone and Namaste. Welcome to my NPTEL course on interior design and today we are going to see lecture number 6 and it talks about principles and elements of interior design. We will discuss these with the help of some examples and we will also try to understand what is composition and why it is important when we talk about interior design or interior architecture as i have been talking about since the beginning. So, there are principles of interior design, elements of interior design, composition and we'll also see some references and when we talk about principles of interior design they are basically concepts and principles that help us to define and accomplish our projects right interior architecture projects and there are majorly seven principles that come very handy when we design interior spaces.

So, these are balance, unity, rhythm, emphasis, scale and proportion, contrast and also the amount of detailing. So, I always believe in, you know, God is in the details and details help achieve a certain vocabulary when we design spaces and projects. So, we start with understanding the balance, which could be said as the art of equilibrium. And, you know, it refers to symmetrical and geometric use of space and which accounts for one of the most essential factors in designing any interior space. And it involves, you know, an understanding of stability.

There are three kinds of balances, primarily speaking, so symmetrical, asymmetrical and this one, which is very interesting, is radial. So, when we talk about the symmetrical balance, it creates mirror images in a space. And this results in, you know, bilaterally symmetric room or a space. It could be any space. And when we talk about asymmetrical balance, it does not focus on geometric entities.

But there is a balance in terms of the weight of the objects, you know, which may be identical in shape, size, or dimensions. And when we talk about radial balance, it revolves around a central element, which sort of acts as a focal point in the space. So, these are some of the images trying to explain symmetrical balance, which is sort of,

you know, a mirror image along this axis, and asymmetrical balance. And this is sort of a radial balance where there is a central focal item and then radiating attention in the space.

Then, of course, there is also unity, which is a very important principle, and it emphasizes coherence in diversity. So, we may be using diverse elements or diverse objects, but we could still achieve a coherent space by, you know, achieving unity in the space. So it is an essential aspect of interior design so that, you know, a harmonious and cohesive space can be designed. And it is possible to achieve unity using complementary colors, certain shapes, you know, which are the same or similar, and patterns or specific elements. They all, you know, then finally tie into a common theme, and therefore it is possible to achieve unity within diversity.

And it can be achieved on a larger scale; it doesn't have to be restricted to only a small space or one particular room. It could, you know, flow freely throughout the entire project. And that could be done by finding a style or a theme which, you know, one could adhere to. Then there is rhythm. And it's sort of a visual cadence, and it gives a very interesting vocabulary to projects.

So, rhythm can be implemented in a space in a variety of ways, and we could achieve it through repetition, transition, progression, or even contrast. And, you know, by repeating similar shapes, patterns, or textures. It could also be done at a micro level within each room or throughout the project. It depends on what the design is. Then there is emphasis, which is basically crafting focal points within interior spaces or the overall project.

It involves drawing attention to a certain aspect of the room or space. It could be done by using an accent such as color or through a pattern or texture. There could also be a combination or permutation of these. And, you know, it works very well in combination with radial balance because both of these try to focus on a certain central point or focal area. Color is also a very interesting tool to achieve emphasis.

Painting a feature wall in a bold color or bringing accents of vibrant colors to a certain area could transform a space. These kinds of tools can be used for creating emphasis, and color becomes a very important medium to do that. Emphasis highlights and draws attention to a specific area of the room or space, creating visual impact. There

are five ways to emphasize focal points within interior spaces. These could be furniture, accents, lighting, color (as we just discussed), texture, shape, and pattern.

So, when we try to create emphasis through furniture, we could use a statement piece of furniture. and it could serve as a focal point in its own right. Furniture placement can also be used to influence a focal point like how we are placing the furniture in what orientation and with what detailing. So, placing sofas chairs and tables around a fireplace for example that could create emphasis it could you know encourage people to gather around and it could draw traffic to the space Also, furniture in contrasting colors and textures will leave an impact on the viewer. And, you know, it's a very interesting scheme to create emphasis like that. Distinct forms can also foster emphasis, such as highlighting a sculpture within a space of clean lines.

That would also create an emphasis. Now, if we talk about emphasis through accents, one could use accents to enhance the visual appeal and to elevate the overall feel of the space. It could include window furnishings, moldings, some artworks, even furniture pieces like bookshelves. And statement furniture pieces can also be emphasized by accents such as cushions, etc. Like we see an example over here.

So, these are the sources for the images basically, wherever we have tried to draw references from. It's also possible to achieve emphasis through lighting. And that's in any case a very important aspect of interior design projects or interior architecture projects, the lighting design itself. So strategically placed lighting, you know, is a powerful way to create emphasis. The eye is drawn to areas of contrast naturally where there is, you know, light meeting darkness.

And lighting can be used to illuminate design features, for example, the alcoves or arcways. So, this is sort of an alcove lighting. And it's possible to accentuate, emphasize, or highlight it through lighting design - this kind of space, area, or ceiling. Now, some light fixtures, for example, chandeliers or pendant lights, whether suspended or hanging hovering over a dining table or any other space, depending on the function and typology of the project, can create emphasis and focal points. And it's also possible to achieve emphasis through colors, as we have been discussing.

Color, in any case, is a very important aspect or element of interior design. It is also one of the easiest ways to emphasize a focal point by using a carefully designed color

palette. Accent walls, for example, emphasize through color subtly without committing to a full overhaul of a space. Certain accent walls, like just this one wall here, could be an interesting way to emphasize. Even with neutral shades, a point of contrast can become the focal point, like gray against warm white.

So even that kind of emphasis is possible through colors. A more playful effect with a splash of bright color can also be achieved within a space. This especially works well with a monochrome scheme, such as this. So, this gets highlighted here as a playful bright color. And here, this is also a very vibrant color scheme that we see.

Then we can achieve emphasis through textures, shapes, and patterns. And, you know, the textures and patterns could energize a space. And, you know, for example, exposed brickwork, vibrant patterned wallpaper, or intricately carved furniture. These can all become anchor points for the eye and focal points within the space. Also, shapes and patterns can introduce contrast and emphasize the focal point, such as a textured rug on a bare floor that will stand out.

An interior plant, for example, a fern, can also add texture to a space. So, plants like these. Lines can be used to determine the flow of a space. So, lines, you know, are a very important element of interior design. If we talk about horizontal lines used in the design, vertical lines can break the pattern and the monotony created by horizontal lines.

Hence, vertical lines and certain patterns or geometries achieved through these lines can stand out in a space and create attention and emphasis. Now let's talk about scale and proportion, which is about balancing sizes and is very important for interior architects, designers, and all kinds of designers to understand. The scale and proportion of objects are largely determined by the size of the space, and they go hand in hand. There is an interrelationship between these two. So, it's important to consider the size of the room, the height of the ceilings, and match furniture and decorations accordingly to the entire fit-out.

So, a room with higher ceiling will benefit from taller furniture and focal points such as bookshelves. Whereas these could be very overwhelming if we use a smaller room because it will get overcrowded. Scale and proportion create visually interesting spaces. And, you know, art pieces on the wall, potted plants, shelving, these can also

add dimensions and aid in cultivating a very visually stimulating environment. Now let's talk about contrast and it, you know, helps in amplifying visual interest within a space.

It is about combining visually juxtaposing objects, you know, and it creates a very striking effect by virtue of this contrast. Like we see over here, like a stark contrast between these two. This surface and furniture, also the color. So, the material palette as well as the color, this sort of brings the contrast. Again, color is an easy method or a way, you know, to implement some contrast in a space.

Little contrast is effective. Too much can be very, very overwhelming and chaotic, but it sorts of depends on what the design is. But little contrast is always way more effective. Selecting a few areas to implement contrast, you know, it keeps a room visually interesting. It gives some kind of a definition to that space.

Talking about details, now details could really come in handy in personalizing the space, making it a place, particularizing it for the user. Creating nice sensory experiences and visual stimuli within that project. So, focusing on small details can create an environment which is very unique, and details could be of any kind: patterns, furnishing details, accessories, even hardware like door handles, etc. Throughout the project. They could be points of interest as well as create a very nice design vocabulary within the space.

So, these intricate details can really enhance the space, and these details could be, you know, also organized or coordinated in a certain manner. They would help achieve configuration within spaces, and through the help of material palette and particular specifications, certain complex details are possible to achieve. Now, you know, other than these basic principles, we could also talk about alignment, repetition, movement, also the white space or the spaces in between that we see. So, these principles focus, you know, on unifying a theme, combining motifs to create a pattern, identifying the need to remove unnecessary or extra elements. So, these are also like important tools in the, you know, kit that the designer uses for creating very interesting interior spaces.

Now, contemporary design is focused more on minimizing the use of extra elements. And, you know, it's sort of becoming very minimal, very functional, although there is

no sacrosanct rule, and to each their own and what the client will want. But yes, it is more inclined toward, you know, minimal usage of elements as per the vogue that is going on. And contemporary designs are also characterized by monochromatic undertones, very dynamic lines, also natural settings. So, since we are talking about details and how they help elevate the interior architecture project, they have a lot of attributes that could really, you know, support the project and make it stand out.

So, details could help us in achieving the following attributes and much more beyond this. So, expressiveness, functionality, beauty or aesthetics, a certain style—whether it's to recreate a period style or to do something with a Victorian style or contemporary design. What is the utilitarian aspect within the design? Even the details can bring that out. The economy, comfort within a project, and of course, the safety measures.

That's also very important. We could add a lot of things here. For example, sustainability, since we are talking about SDGs quite a lot throughout the module, and circularity, etc. So, the details can help us achieve these attributes as well. Now, what are the elements of interior design?

That's also very important to understand when putting a project together. So, these are basic elements. They are used to produce an aesthetically relevant, creative, pleasing, and functional project. Again, we have seven basic elements which could be very useful for creating interior design projects or interior architecture projects. And they are space, line, form, light, color, texture, and pattern.

All of these are very, very important. Let's talk a bit about space. We have already discussed space versus place and the elements of space-making. What does space mean to users and designers? We have been constantly discussing it throughout different lectures.

So, it could be referred to as a framework for all interior design basics. A project begins with an assessment of the space or room in which one shall create, design, or remodel. And, you know, it's very, very crucial to understand positive space and negative space. When space is filled with design elements, it is called positive space. And when space in a room is intentionally left empty, it is called negative space.

This is a very basic and simple, or loosely put, definition. So, you know, to understand the interplay of positive and negative space. This kind of balance between positive and negative space is what the designer focuses on or aspires to achieve. Let's talk about line. So, line is another very, very important element within the interior design fraternity and used for projects.

And it could be horizontal, vertical, dynamic, and it helps our eye achieve a certain movement. It focuses the eye on these kinds of, you know, attributes like horizontality, verticality, dynamism, etc. So horizontal lines, they are created in, you know, positive spaces through furniture, cabinets, counters, wall hangings, even, you know, lighting decor. And vertical lines are built into a negative space through, you know, windows, doors, walls and flooring. So, we always take cues and references and, you know, through these elements of space making and then try to create this kind of a vertical expanse or a horizontal expanse, etc.

within a space. Now lines define the way a space flow. It gives the eye a sense of where to move and, you know, what could be the movement of eye be like. Dynamic lines like diagonal and curved lines, they create a lot of interest. They draw attention to specific areas within the space or specific detailing that one, you know, may have created to draw attention towards.

And combination of different lines could create, you know, stability, balance, sense of direction, etc. Lots of different characteristics within a space. Talking about form, yeah, I mean, form is, of course, very, very important. The overall sort of cognizance and sense of what we are looking at. And the key to achieving a form is characterized by creating a natural balance and shape.

And actually, not differentiating the space through strong and sharp geometries. Light—again, light—we have had a lot of discussion. We will talk about it throughout the course, whether it's green interiors or, you know, surface finishes. We will be talking about the role of light quite prominently, actually. So, natural and artificial light, you know,

They could be used in combination. They are important elements of any interior design project. And the interplay between these two—the man-made and organic lighting—also defines the mood within a space. And if we talk about organic light, it

creates, you know, perception within a space. And artificial lighting can create intimacy, mood, and it can also give the perception of smaller spaces, depending entirely on the design aspects.

So, we see over here the natural light or daylight, which is facilitated through these large openings. And the site is oriented in such a way that it facilitates daylight. This is task lighting, accent lighting, and mood lighting. There is a discussion on these where we talk about lighting design. Color.

Color is an inevitable element when we talk about the interior architecture industry and interior design projects. A very fundamental and crucial element. It can give a lot of definition to a space. It can unify a space. It can provide emphasis.

It can be part of detailing. It can be used in many customized ways. Particularly when we talk about creating emphasis through colors, the 60-30-10 color rule is very handy. It is followed technically in the sense that 60% is the main color, which is usually neutral. 30% would be the secondary color in the color palette, and it provides contrast.

It also supports the main color. The remaining 10% is the accent color, which is usually very bright and draws attention. Here, if we see, this 60% is the main color. This one here is the 30% in the 60-30-10 rule. And this one here is the 10% accent color.

And the combination of this, you know, kind of creates this very, very interesting space. And overall, a sort of balance is achieved while putting this all together in a place. Talking about texture, so texture is, again, a very important aspect of interior design projects and spaces which are, you know, inhabited by the users. And it is experienced visually and viscerally.

And it's, you know, it can be felt; it can be very tactile, it can be touched. And it can tell lots of stories about a space, create spaces with history and permanence. So, it's a very, very important element and a very important aspect of design. And you know, it gives spaces a very timeless appeal sometimes, depending on what you are trying to create. And it's important to understand visual textures and actual textures.

So visual textures, for example, like marble. You know, they could create the illusion of physical textures and actual textures. Let's say, like cactus and velvet. They are very palpable. They can be felt.

They can be touched. So textures are quite interesting. And then moving on to pattern now. So, you know, pattern is also a very interesting element and pattern could be achieved by combining certain motives or, you know, certain kinds of diverse elements. Let's say by repeating shapes or, you know, by introducing certain theme which binds these shapes together or the motives together.

And they could be also used for creating a certain focal point and emphasis. Also, sometimes rhythm depending on what and where you have designed it. So patterns are quite eye-catching and they can be particularly pronounced in fabric, wallpaper, tiling, carpeting etc. And the principles of interior design are guidelines that are used to create visually appealing spaces and the elements that we just saw they are actually what are used to adhere to these principles. For example, when focusing on the principle of contrast we

Primarily, we would be using the elements of light and color. So, this inter-relationship and, you know combination and permutation of which element, which principle, how does it come handy technically speaking, sometimes just for aesthetic, but sometimes also in terms of the science behind, you know how to enhance the perception within a space. All of these need to be really understood, experienced, learned through practice. So they will all come very, very handy for interior design projects. So, these elements and principles, when they are put together, they work wonders for interior design projects.

Now, this golden ratio in interior design is quite interesting and somewhat important to understand how this ratio helps in interior design projects. I have provided just an overview and very important basic rules because this itself could be a very crucial and extensive discussion. So, the golden ratio can actually be a very reliable tool for achieving balance. And here we see, you know, there is this ratio that has been achieved, which is the golden ratio. How proportionately and, you know, these elements are put together to achieve this overall sense of balance.

So, using the golden ratio allows the design to feel organic and pleasing to the eye, of course, while keeping in mind the overall balance and proportion. The golden ratio helps achieve a balanced room layout, and for practical application, the ratio that could be very useful could be 60 to 40, or it is also known as the 60-30-10 rule, which means 60% of the space will have furniture and 40% could be clear. So, let's say you were to put furniture within a space, and if we could use the 60-40 ratio or 60-30-10 rule and try to achieve this 60%-40% balance, the overall layout would be very functional, effective, and also very balanced. The golden ratio can guide furniture selection as well because we have a proportional framework in place, and it also aligns with the principles of balance and visual harmony. And it does allow designers to make informed decisions, make choices about size, placement, and coordination of furniture within a space as per this framework, which is sort of a thumb rule.

Applying the golden ratio while accessorizing the project can also be very helpful, you know, and we could get very thoughtfully curated spaces, and the pieces, you know, they could be selected on the basis of two-thirds the size of the wall to give a visual balance. So, for gallery walls, let's say, select pieces that are proportionate to one another and leave 60% of the wall blank to provide an overall balance. So, that's again a very handy rule. And these are some applications of the golden ratio. You know, here in the staircase, the media console over here, this design again we see.

Over here, this is the golden ratio. Here we see the golden ratio. Also, here in this traditional house and these light fixtures. So, this ratio can be seen on varied objects in different projects at different scales. Understanding composition.

Composition is very important to create interesting, appealing projects. So, A visual arrangement in which separate elements come together to form a whole is how composition could be understood. And the world of interior design has its laws—the laws of composition. If we try to violate those laws, it could create a lack of balance and harmony.

All the objects in the room must interact with each other, and they could interact through different interrelationships to create an overall geometry, concept, and composition. There could be chaos and order within a composition. There could be chaos, order, order, and chaos. These are all different ways of looking at composition. A well-thought-out interior design never looks like a random set of objects.

Although, while I'm speaking, I could also say that it could be random, and within randomness, a certain order could be created. It depends on the design sensibilities and the kind of project that one is looking at. Spaces full of details or mixed styles, or, you know, different periods, they can also be treated through composition. And we can try not to create them in a chaotic manner but have a certain composition, even though these distinct elements are put together. Then, when we talk about composition, there is also an important aspect of room dominance and center.

So, within an interior composition, is there something dominant that has been designed? There is something that the eye looks at, you know, the first thing when we enter that space. So, it's possible to do that, and it could be done either through a statement object or centerpiece, or color, or could be highlighted through a shape or scale, etc. And it doesn't necessarily have to be in the center of the space. It could be anywhere.

And these are some examples. You know, the common centric elements like a fireplace, TV area, carpet, etc. It's also very useful to understand symmetry and asymmetry while we are talking about composition. And also, it can depend on the individual or the clientele, whether symmetry is preferred or asymmetry is preferred. And both are actually quite interesting.

Personally, going by my own vocabulary, I like a lot of asymmetry, but again, I try to have an asymmetrical balance within the space. So, we can create all of these. Symmetry is fairly logical and organized, while asymmetry is quite dynamic and interesting. So, one could pick and choose. Then also, what is the relationship between or among the different objects that are put together in a space?

Because, you know, We, as humans and as part of our behavior, perceive everything holistically. So, how are we looking at different objects, elements, or pieces put together in the sense that what is the interrelationship between them? So, whenever there is a harmonious interior scheme, it does make the user quite comfortable and relatable in that sense. And, you know, it has to be very interesting in the way that the relationship between the objects or the elements is put together.

For example, here, the rounded back of the sofa can echo the shape of this table. So, we can create these kinds of interrelationships even though there are diverse objects

of different nature. Contrasts and accents are, of course, another important factor which impacts composition greatly. So, objects in an interior space can be friends not only due to a relationship but also with the help of contrast. And contrasting colors are quite used in contemporary designs to create very expressive designs or pieces.

And the main thing is that one doesn't do, you know, too much of any particular element. So too much contrast is also not good. So, it has to be understood in a very subtle manner. Now we'll see some references after this discussion on elements and principles of design. I've put together some of the websites.

Image sources are always there on the slides themselves. Plus, more references for, you know, broader and in-depth understanding. This will be our next lecture, and we will focus primarily on space-making elements. I'll see you next time. Thank you very much for your time.