Designing a Meditation Room

Aesthetics, Functionality & Atmosphere

Practical advice for designing a meditation room at home, plus recommendations for health-care professionals who wish to design a meditation room for their students and clients.

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**Introduction**

Designing a meditation room can be an incredibly enjoyable and satisfying process. If you are fortunate enough to have a space that you can dedicate purely to the practice of meditation, then this book will help you to create your own special sanctuary.

Over the years I have always put one room aside in my own house for the purpose of meditation. This room is inevitably the most rewarding to design and decorate, and it usually ends up becoming my favourite room in the house.

I must also acknowledge the fact that whenever I attend a meditation class of any type, I always notice the quality and feel of the venue to which I am invited. It makes so much difference when the instructor has taken the time and effort to create a great space in which to meditate. If it is warm and inviting and has a positive atmosphere, then all the attendees find it so much easier to relax and get into the right frame of mind for meditation.

Much of what you read here will be dedicated to helping you create a “look and feel” for your meditation room that will enhance and deepen your experience of meditation. However designing a meditation room, whether it is for your own personal use or for use as a teaching space, is just as much about functionality as it is about aesthetics and atmosphere. A good meditation room needs to meet the needs of the people who use it, and so we need to think beyond simple questions like “what colour will I paint this room?” For example, how will you manage heating and cooling in your meditation room? Do you need to prevent external noise from invading your meditation space? What equipment might you need to enhance your experience of meditation?

Other practical issues may also arise that you have not yet thought of. For example, if you will be painting your meditation room, you might wish to use special low-emission paints that will minimize the release of fumes and chemicals into your meditation room.

I realize that functional concerns like these might not be as fun to think about as the aesthetics and design of your room, but if they are taken into consideration then you will be more likely to create the meditation room of your dreams. By the time you have finished reading this short e-book, you should be well on your way to having a clear mental picture of what your room will look like, and you will also be armed with plenty of knowledge about how to make it serve your needs during meditation.

Ideally, your meditation room will be a peaceful space that is free from mess and clutter. It will be quiet. It will have a design theme that reflects your personality, and an atmosphere
that enhances your mood. It will also be comfortable, not just in terms of furnishings, but also in terms of temperature and lighting, and it should have room for any equipment and accessories that might be needed to help you get the most out of your meditation.

So let me walk you through some of the most important factors to consider when designing a meditation room.
Overall Room Theme

Let’s start by forming a “big picture” view of what the overall look and feel of your meditation room will be. One of the best ways to do this, even before you start thinking about design elements like colour and furnishings, is to select an overall theme for your meditation room.

Once you can describe the theme of your meditation room, you will probably find it easier to make decisions about all the other design elements to follow. You will find yourself designing a room that is cohesive in terms of its overall look and feel, rather than a room that feels disconnected or thrown together.

Here are just a few examples of themes for your meditation room. Please keep in mind that these are just ideas to stimulate your own thoughts about how you might like your meditation room to look and feel.

The Resort

Resort style meditation rooms are inspired by the idea of an exotic vacation. Words that spring to mind are “Balinese retreat” or “Day Spa”. Think of a relaxing place where you have been on holiday and try to recreate the look and feel of that place.

Spartan/Minimalistic

Minimalistic rooms usually feature light, neutral colour tones and have a very stripped back look and feel about them. Only the bare essentials are catered for in a minimalistic room. This type of meditation room is all about simplicity, serenity and the total avoidance of visual clutter.
The Rainbow

Lots and lots of vibrant colours! For some people this kind of theme can be overwhelming, but for others it is totally invigorating. You can break all the rules with a rainbow theme...paint different walls different colours, add brightly coloured furnishings, display colourful pictures. The trick is not to stop halfway with a rainbow theme. Go all-out and saturate your meditation room with colour.

The Cocoon

Cocoon-like meditation rooms are designed to be warm, inviting, enveloping and reclusive. The cocoon effect is best suited to smaller rooms as it is harder to accomplish in a large space. Darker colour tones combined with plenty of natural candle light work very well to create a space that cocoons you in warmth and peace.

The Illuminator

Quite the opposite to The Cocoon, the Illuminator feels open, spacious and is full of natural light. Bright colour tones combined with plenty of comfortable furnishings and natural cloth combine to create a very pure, luminous space.

The Temple

The Temple theme is inspired by temples, shrines and places of sacred worship. In most cases this is a room that includes plenty of natural elements, like stone, wood carvings, incense and candles. Aztec, Asian or African culture may influence the design.
Create Your Own Personal Theme
What inspires you? What places make you feel at peace? When you think of meditation, spirituality or relaxation, what places or images come to mind? Let your imagination run free and develop your own personal theme. If you are designing a meditation room for yourself, then your room theme does not have to meet anyone’s criteria but your own. Make it special and uniquely yours.
Colour Schemes

Now that you have a theme in mind for your meditation room, it’s time to begin selecting a colour scheme. There really are no specific rules when it comes to colours, and in many cases your own personal taste will guide you to the colour tones that are right for you, however there are a few important factors to consider.

First of all, keep in mind that colour can have a very direct effect on the way you feel. You are probably already aware of this on an intuitive level, but it might surprise you to know that scientific tests have actually proven that after being exposed to specific colours, we experience mental, emotional and even physical changes. Your blood pressure, body temperature and appetite can all be affected by colour, so choose colours that have a positive effect on your overall sense of wellbeing.

Just ask yourself, “How do I want to feel in this room?” and then visualize colours that represent those feelings for you. You might like to start by writing down a list of feelings that describe how you want to feel when you walk into your meditation room. You might use words like serene, balanced, relaxed or invigorated, to name a few. Now picture yourself surrounded by the colour(s) you have in mind and observe your response. Does the colour scheme in your mind bring about the right feelings for you? Does it enhance the essence of who you are? Does it fit in with the room theme you have in mind?

Exercise a little restraint at this juncture. Your mood may vary from day to day, and so the colours that seem most appealing to you may change as well. Give it time.

Colours and Space Perception
The colours you choose will have an effect on your perception of space in the room. For example, darker colours may feel very cosy, but they can make a room feel smaller. Lighter colour on the other hand will help to open a room up, but may not have the warmth you are after.

Colour Selection
Most interior decorators will advise you to avoid the overuse of bold colours, however if a certain colour resonates positively with you, then do not hesitate to defy convention and use as much of it as you like. Keep your desired room theme in mind and go with your instincts. If in doubt about colours for your meditation room, then order a sample of the paint you have in mind and try it out on a wall or two.
More tips on colour and paint:
Have you ever heard of the 60:30:10 design rule? This design rule is a suggested guide to the proportions of colour that you should use in a room: 60% dominant colour, 30% intermediate colour, 10% accent colour. Typically, the dominant colour covers most of the walls, the intermediate colour might be used on one feature wall, and the accent colour might be used just around window frames or on doors. Monochromatic rooms can be a little bland, but rooms with too many colours can be visually distracting. The 60:30:10 design rule is just a handy hint for creating a colour scheme that is nicely balanced.

If you are finding colour selection to be difficult, head down to your local paint shop. Most offer free colour charts, free colour scheme suggestions and cheap, if not free sample paints. Many paint manufacturers also offer very helpful online guides which may include free colour selection software and colour scheme advice.

Paint and Air Quality
If you are concerned about the purity of the air in your meditation room, please consider using low-emission paints so as to minimize the presence of chemical fumes. In a process known as “off-gassing”, paints release small quantities of chemicals into the atmosphere for months or even years after they have finished drying. Low emission paints reduce this effect dramatically.

If you intend to use any high-gloss paints in your meditation room, make sure you select a water-based variety. Oil-based high gloss paints look great, but they take days to dry properly and they can smell for weeks afterwards.
Lighting

I have addressed the subject of lighting immediately after the subject of colour because colour and light interplay with one another in a variety of ways, dramatically affecting the way we perceive the space around us. For example, a room that has been painted in warm colours may still seem cold if the wrong type of lighting is used. Likewise, a room may seem smaller or larger depending on the way colour and light are combined. A lack of lighting will make colours seem darker than they really are, and too much lighting may wash out the colours in your room.

Light Control
If you are designing a meditation room, it is important that you have control over light levels. So if your meditation room has windows, they will probably need blinds or curtains of some sort (more on window furnishings a little later on). Overhead lights are best if they feature a dimming function, which will allow you to have total control over the light levels in your room.

A quick tip on light dimmers – these are not all equal! The cheapest light dimmers use poor quality circuitry and sometimes emit a humming or buzzing sound when the lights are turned down low! Ask for good quality dimmers and avoid this irritating problem.

I also recommend that you do not meditate in total darkness. Personally, when I meditate I don’t like a completely dark room, but I don’t like it to be too bright either, so I will dim down the overhead lights and light a candle or two. Speaking of candles, this brings me to another point about light...

Light quality
Light is often divided into two main categories – cool and warm (sometimes referred to as “blue” or “yellow” in tint). In almost all cases warm lighting is the best choice for a meditation room.

In case you hadn’t guessed already, candles provide a very warm light indeed, and provide more gentle, natural ambience than almost any other light form you can imagine.
If you have the choice, avoid fluorescent lighting. Fluorescent light is the coldest, bluest and most sterile type of light. Worse still, large fluorescent lighting fixtures (the kind that are found in many commercial premises) are also famous for “flicker”. This occurs when the brightness of the light oscillates ever so slightly, but very rapidly. For some people this can cause irritation and even headaches.

I am aware that in some countries, traditional light globes have been prohibited in an effort to reduce energy consumption, leaving fluorescent globes as the only available alternative. Fortunately, most fluorescent globe manufacturers realize how unpopular the cold light of fluorescence can be, and many of them now offer specially designed “warm” fluorescent globes.

Both traditional filament light globes and halogen light globes produce a very warm type of light. Please note that blue-tinted halogen globes are available for people who prefer a colder light. Unless this is your preference you should avoid this type of halogen globe...something to keep in mind the next time you are shopping for replacements!

**Feature Lighting and Lamps**
The addition of lamps is an excellent way to add more controlled lighting options to a meditation room. Feature lighting like this can be used to add emphasis to one part of your room, and will provide plenty of atmosphere. Salt crystal lamps are a popular choice for meditation rooms these days, but are hardly your only option...why not try using candles in coloured glass holders to cast a vibrant glow about your room?
When designing a meditation room, keep the above recommendations in mind and you will be well on your way to creating a room that has great atmosphere and that can be adjusted to suit your needs at any time of day or night.
Acoustics

Acoustics is probably the least exciting aspect of meditation room design, but it is well worth thinking about for a moment or two, especially if you are designing a meditation room from scratch.

If you happen to live far away from civilization, in the countryside or by the ocean, then you are probably fortunate enough to be mostly free from the noise and calamity of our modern world. Most people do not fall into this category, and so for them, having a quiet space to meditate in is most advantageous.

Sometimes it’s simply not possible to block the intrusion of unwanted sound into your living spaces, and in any case, some people aren't particularly bothered by environmental noise. However, if you are someone who is sensitive to interrupting noise, and if you have the opportunity to address acoustics, then the following information may prove very helpful indeed.

Room Selection

If you are going to design a meditation room that will be a part of your own home, then think about which rooms in your house are the quietest. Often this means selecting the room that is farthest away from the road or street you live on.

If you are designing a meditation room to teach in, then pay particular attention to the location of the venue. If possible, avoid busy locations where vehicular or pedestrian traffic is heavy. However, if it essential to the success of your business that you locate your meditation studio somewhere busy, then pay extra attention to the acoustic integrity of the premises that you select.

Another thing to watch out for in shared properties is the construction of floors and walls. Will you be disturbed by people in other rooms, or by the thud of footsteps on the floor above you? Brick or cement walls and/or floors will provide a great deal more acoustic isolation than plaster walls and timber floors. Take note of these details if you are considering a venue in which to teach meditation.
Acoustic Construction

If you are fortunate enough to be building a meditation room from scratch, then you have the opportunity to address acoustics right up front. With the right approach, and minimal expense, you can create a room that is virtually impenetrable to all but the loudest sounds, without compromising on the aesthetics of your sacred space. Here are a few pointers:

1. Ask your builder to construct internal walls with acoustic-grade plasterboard (drywall). For severely noisy locations, walls can be constructed with two layers of acoustic plasterboard for even greater protection. If you are concerned about the noise levels in your immediate environment, don’t hesitate to discuss the subject of acoustics with your builder. He or she will be able to suggest a number of construction techniques that will dramatically reduce the levels of sound that penetrate into your meditation room, without costing the earth.
2. Use solid hardwood entrance/exit doors. These block more than twice as much sound as typical hollow core doors.
3. Use double glazing on the windows.

What about Acoustic Foam Panelling?

Contrary to popular belief, acoustic foam will not actually block any sound from entering your meditation room. Acoustic foam is designed to absorb sound within a room, preventing echoes and reverberation. It’s an expensive and unnecessary treatment and its effect on incoming noise is negligible. If your meditation room has already been built and you are unhappy with the amount of noise that makes its way into the room, then I’m afraid that the only way to improve your situation is to apply the construction techniques I have just mentioned. At the very least, double glazing and solid doors can be added to your room without creating too much mess or inconvenience, and these steps will have a dramatic effect on reducing the levels of incoming sound.
Furnishings

If you have established a theme for your room and have decided on a colour scheme, then you’ll find the process of selecting furnishings to be an enjoyable, easy exercise. Simply choose furnishings that suit your own personal taste, and that fit in with the theme and colour scheme of your room.

Keep in mind that the word “furnishings” incorporates more than just chairs and couches. Furnishings include carpets, blinds, curtains and other items such as side tables, buffets and rugs to name a few.

**Window Furnishings**
If you have windows in your meditation room and you wish to have complete control over light levels, then you will need to install blackout blinds or heavy curtains.

Curtains often add charm and cosiness to meditation rooms. The visual effect of soft folding drapery can be quite relaxing. Heavy curtains, in addition to providing excellent light control, present quite a “snugly” ambience (great for cocoon-theme rooms). In contrast, lighter curtains made from sheer fabrics will add a delicate, wispy softness. The alternatives; roller blinds, Roman blinds, vertical blinds and Venetians to name a few, are all perfectly suitable, but are more contemporary in appearance and often don’t have much of a “fabric feel” to them. They are perhaps more suited to minimalistic design themes. However, don’t let this suggestion become a rule for you. Window furnishings don’t have to be a feature that takes centre stage in your meditation room. As long as you understand how your blinds or curtains will perform, then you should allow your own taste to guide you when it comes to the aesthetic contribution of window furnishings.

**Arranging Furniture**
If you are designing a meditation room for professional use, then give some consideration to the layout of furniture in your room. If you wish to teach a number of students at once, and you want your students to mingle and interact with each other, then consider a circular or semi-circular furniture arrangement. This will allow your students to see each other, encouraging group interaction and more congeniality. If your students sit side by side in a straight line and do not face each other, they are sometimes less sociable, and less inclined to relax in each other’s presence.
Take a seat...
There are a number of specialized chairs and cushions available that are designed specifically for practicing meditation. Meditation cushions (zafus and zabutons), meditation benches, and ergonomically designed chairs for postural support are all excellent additions to a meditation room and they can improve your meditation technique by helping you to remain comfortable and balanced.

Zafu and Zabuton cushions provide very comfortable seating, whether you like to meditate in either a cross legged or kneeling position.

If you prefer not to sit on a more solid surface, then a meditation bench will assist your meditation greatly. A well designed meditation bench will have a slightly downward sloping seat that will tip your pelvis forward and naturally guide your back into proper alignment. I highly recommend the use of a meditation bench like this.

I also recommend that you avoid buying a plain timber meditation bench. They may look nice but they tend to be very hard on your bottom! Trying to soften a wooden bench by adding your own cushion may lead to frustration, as your cushion may slip across the surface of the bench. Buy a meditation bench with a padded surface like the one pictured above and you will be very comfortable indeed.

However, it’s not absolutely critical that you use specialized furniture for meditation. Do you have a favourite chair or couch that you love? Use it! Be comfortable. Any seating is suitable for meditation so long as it encourages correct posture.
The Visual Effect of Soft Furnishings
Last but not least, let’s not forget the soothing visual effect that soft furnishings can have. The sheer presence of some soft, comfortable furniture and plush pillows is enough to lull some people into a state of relaxation. Soft furnishings are also great for breaking up sharp angles and softening hard corners. So unless you are designing a meditation room with a minimalistic design theme, it is a great idea to add something soft to your space.
Heating and Cooling

It goes without saying that the temperature of your meditation room will be critical to your personal comfort. Depending on your geographical location, you may need both heating and cooling facilities in your meditation room.

My advice regarding heating and cooling units relates to the noise that they produce, and the cleanliness of their heating process.

Heating
Hydronic heaters and radiant heaters operate almost silently. They also produce a very clean heat as they do not actively circulate the air, that is to say, they don’t use fans. This means less dust and airborne contaminants for you and your visitors.

Portable fan heaters and central heating may warm up a room more quickly, but they do make more noise and they circulate dust. For most people this is not a concern, but for those of you with allergies, hydronic and radiant heaters are a much healthier choice.

Wood Fire Heating
How could I forget to mention fireplaces and wood heaters? These might not be the most practical heating devices to install and operate, but who can deny the dreamy, mesmerizing appeal of a crackling open fire? They are wonderful for a meditation room.

Cooling
The noise made by cooling units can be substantial, and so if you have the opportunity to install new air conditioning, select a “split system” unit. The noisy fans of the unit can be installed outside your home, away from your meditation room, and the cool air you need is fed quietly into your meditation room via ducting.
Equipment and Accessories

The following is just a short list of some additional items that you may wish to add to your meditation room to enhance your overall experience of meditation.

The first item that springs to mind is a stereo system for playing meditation music or for listening to guided meditations. You might also like to keep some headphones handy too.

You may wish to provide yourself with some bedding or a comfortable floor mat to lie on. It’s good practice to spend some time lying flat on your back after you have completed a meditation, so make sure that you have somewhere comfortable to do this.

Please note that if you are designing a meditation room for commercial use and you intend to burn candles or incense in that space, you must ensure that a fire extinguisher is available. Better safe than sorry!

If you are designing a meditation room and you are short on storage space, then you may also wish to introduce a small cupboard, side table, or even a small decorative box for storing candles, incense, matches, books...whatever you use on a day to day basis.

I recommend that you do not dilute the purity of your meditation space by bringing a television into it. Remember that the point of a meditation room is to create a space that is focussed around the practice of meditation. It’s not a room for general recreation.
Space Clearing and Energy Cleansing

Have you ever noticed how you can feel uplifted when you walk in to some rooms, and exhausted after you spend time in others? Have you ever noticed how some rooms feel stale, or have you ever sensed the tension that remains in a room after an argument? If so, then you will understand that the energy of a room can have a life of its own.

If you are designing a meditation room, there are a number of steps you can take to ensure that your room feels positive, uplifted and full of life. In fact, there are so many techniques that can be used for space clearing and energy cleansing that it is beyond the scope of this book to fully explore them all. In this section, I've included a few quick suggestions to start you thinking about clearing the energy of the space in which you meditate.

Sacred Symbols

Introduce positive sacred symbol(s) into your meditation room. You may use symbols from any healing modality that you are familiar with. Their positive vibrations help to prevent unwanted negative energies from collecting in your room.

Plants

A certain calmness comes from the presence of nature’s gifts, and introducing a little foliage into your meditation room is an excellent way to add a sense of “life” to your space.

It’s well known that plants cleanse the air by removing carbon dioxide and releasing pure oxygen. But apart from their effect on the quality of the air in your meditation room, many plants are said to have a positive effect on the energies around them, absorbing and transmuting negativity. Because plants can absorb energy from the space around them, the health and appearance of a houseplant may also indicate the health of the energy in a room.

Cacti are often said to be excellent plants for protecting against negativity and for removing depressive energies, but almost any plant can contribute towards energy cleansing in your meditation room. Just be sure to introduce plants that will survive indoors and that are
suitable for the light and temperature levels of your meditation room. There’s no faster way to degrade the pure loving space of a meditation room than the presence of a dying plant!

**Water**

Water is a symbol of cleansing and purity and it also symbolizes emotions. A glass or ceramic bowl that holds water can be used to purify energies in your meditation room. Replace the water regularly and consider “energizing” it by giving it some time to spend in sunlight.

**Salt**

Add a bowl containing natural rock salt to your meditation room. It will absorb negative energies in much the same way as a bowl of water. Remember to replace the salt regularly, and do not use it for eating after it has served its purpose!

**Fresh Air**

It’s easy to forget to refresh the air in your meditation room. Open the windows and doors to your room once in a while, if not daily, to allow fresh air in and to allow any stagnant air to depart.

**Incense**

Incense has been used in various spiritual ceremonies and as an everyday part of temple life for thousands of years. Burning incense is a great way to cleanse the energies in a room and prepare the space for meditation.

**Energy Clearing with Sound**

As Denise Linn writes in her book *Space Clearing*, “Sound has the mystical ability to restore harmony in objects, people and environments...In monasteries and temples throughout history, sacred sound has been used to create hallowed ground.”

Tibetan bells and singing bowls are popular instruments for clearing the energy in a meditation room. The sound vibrations they produce are very soothing and very effective at harmonizing and purifying the energy in a meditation room.
Alternatively, you can enhance the energy in your meditation room by playing some meditation music. The positive effect that soothing meditation music has on the energy of a room is almost instant.

Crystals
It would be hard to complete an essay about meditation rooms without mentioning the word “crystal” somewhere along the way. Crystals are an immensely popular inclusion in meditation rooms, not only because of their various energetic properties, but also because they are so beautiful to look at.
Conclusions

Aesthetics, functionality, atmosphere. We’ve covered all the major aspects of designing a meditation room. As you digest and assimilate all this information, it’s important to keep in mind that your meditation room does not have to meet all of the recommendations laid out in this book. All that is really important is that your meditation room becomes a space that you love to be in, even if it’s not “perfect”.

When you dedicate a space to the practice of meditation, you imbue that space with a purity of purpose. The room itself becomes a sanctuary that is focussed around your intention to meditate. It is more than just a nice looking room; it is a place that encourages you to meditate with great depth. It is a place that symbolizes your desire to experience inner silence. The moment you walk into your meditation room, the purpose and meaning that you have assigned to it will reach out to you and remind you...it’s time to be at peace.