

Varnum's Rules of Design for Furniture

Three phases of design:

1. *Structural design*
2. *Contour enrichment*
3. *Surface enrichment*

THE PRIMARY MASS

Rule 1a: A primary mass must be either vertical or horizontal according to the intended surface, unless prohibited by technical requirements. Begin with a rectangle. *(page 13)*

Rule 1b: A primary mass should have the ratio of 1:3, 3:4, 3:5, 5:8, 7:10, or some similar proportion difficult for the eye to detect and readily analyze. *(page 15)*

DIVIDING THE MASS HORIZONTALLY

Rule 2a. If the primary mass is divided into two horizontal divisions, the dominance should be either in the upper or lower section. They should not be divided equally. *(page 25)*

Rule 2b. If the primary mass is divided into three horizontal divisions, or sections, the dominance should be placed in the center section with varying widths in the upper and lower thirds. *(page 29)*

Rule 2c. Major horizontal divisions of the primary mass, or the primary mass itself, may be divided into three or more minor divisions by placing the higher masses near the bottom and by sequentially reducing the height measure toward the smaller division or divisions to be located at the top of the mass. *(page 137)*

DIVIDING THE MASS VERTICALLY

Rule 3a. If the primary mass is divided into two vertical divisions, the divisions should be equal in area and similar in form. *(page 35)*

Rule 3b. If the primary mass is divided into three vertical divisions, the center section should be larger, with the remaining divisions of equal size. *(page 37)*

Rule 3c. In elementary problems, if more than three vertical divisions are required, they should be grouped as to analyze into Rules 3a and 3b, or be exactly similar. *(page 41)*

ADDING APPENDAGES TO THE MASS

Rule 4a. The appendage should be designed in unity with, and proportionally related to, the vertical or horizontal character of the primary mass, but subordinated to it. *(page 43)*

Rule 4b. The appendage should have the appearance of flowing smoothly and, if possible, tangentially from the primary mass. *(page 43)*

Rule 4c. The appendage should, if possible, echo or repeat some lines similar in character and direction to those of the primary mass. *(page 43)*

On Curves

It is the unexpected curve that is welcome in all designing, provided it supports the structure and conforms to established rules... (I)t is needless to say that compass curves are not desirable except in rounding small corners or using in fillets... (C)ompass curves are difficult to assimilate into pleasing tangential effects. They are inclined to be monotonous. One should trust to freehand sweeps, drawn freely with a full arm movement when possible.

ENRICHING THE FORM'S CONTOURS

Rule 5a. Outline enrichment should be subordinated to and support the structure. *(page 57)*

Rule 5b. Outline enrichment should add grace, lightness, variety, and unity to the design. *(page 57)*

Rule 5c. Outline, by its similarity, should give a sense of oneness or unity to the design, binding divergent members together. *(page 73)*

ENRICHING THE FORM'S SURFACES

Rule 6a. Surfaces to be enriched must admit enrichment. *(page 99)*

Rule 6b. Surface enrichment must be related to the structural contours but not obscure the actual structure. *(page 101)*

Rule 6c. The treatment must be appropriate to the material. *(page 101)*

Rule 6d. Bands and borders should have a consistent lateral, that is, onward movement. *(page 105)*

Rule 6e. Bands and borders should never have a prominent contrary motion, opposed to the main forward movement. *(page 105)*

Rule 6f. All component parts of a border should move in unison with the main movement of the border. *(page 107)*

Rule 6g. Each component part of a border should be strongly dynamic and, if possible, partake of the main movements of the border. *(page 111)*

Rule 6h. Borders intended for vertical surfaces may have a strongly upward movement in addition to the lateral movement, provided the lateral movement dominates. *(page 107)*

Rule 6i. Inlaid enrichment should never form strong or glaring contrasts with the parent surface. *(page 103)*

Rule 6j. Carved surface enrichment should have the appearance of belonging to the parent mass. *(page 103)*

Rule 7a. Marginal panel enrichment should parallel or be related to the outlines of the primary mass and the panel it is to enrich. *(page 118)*

Rule 7b. Marginal points of concentration in panels should be placed (1) preferably at the corner or (2) in the center of each margin. *(page 118)*

Rule 7c. To ensure unity of design in panels, the elements composing the points of concentration and the links connecting them must be related to the panel contour and to each other. *(page 118)*

Rule 7d. The contours of fully enriched panels should parallel the outlines of the primary mass and repeat its proportions. *(page 123)*

Rule 7e. The points of concentration for a fully enriched square panel may be in its center or in its outer margin. *(page 125)*

Rule 7f. The points of concentration for a fully enriched vertical panel should be in the upper part of the panel. *(page 127)*

Rule 7g. The fully enriched panel and its contents should be designed in unified relation to the structural outlines, with the center line of the panel coinciding with the inceptive axis of the structure. *(page 127)*

Rule 8a. Free ornament for partly or fully enriched surfaces should be based upon an inceptive axis of the structure. *(page 121)*

Rule 8b. Free ornament should be related and subordinated to the structural surfaces. *(page 121)*

Rule 8c. Points of concentration in free enrichment of vertically placed masses are usually located in and around the inceptive axis and above or below the geometric center of the design. *(page 121)*

FINISH

Rule 12a. An average wood stain is to be retained between the values middle and low dark. *(page 202)*

Rule 12d. The relation between the side walls and furniture, trim, etc., should be retained within the range of four values or less, as low light and dark. *(page 202)*