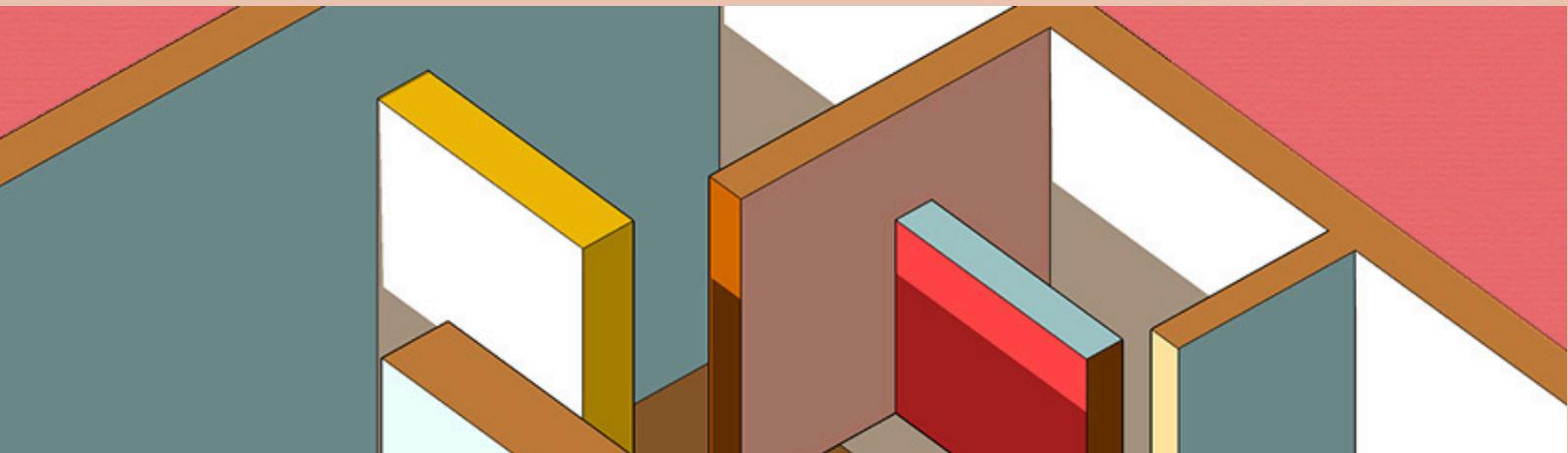


SKETCHUP STARTER

GUIDE
*for interior
designers*



Why Sketchup?

Sketchup is a powerful and intuitive tool that has become a go-to solution for interior designers worldwide. Unlike some other design software that can be complex or require a steep learning curve, Sketchup stands out for its user-friendly interface and comparatively easy-to-master tools. It provides an unparalleled ability to bring interior design concepts to life quickly, allowing designers to transform 2D ideas into 3D models quickly.

Whether you're drafting a room layout, visualizing furniture arrangements, or experimenting with different color schemes and materials, Sketchup allows you to iterate designs swiftly, saving both time and effort.

One of the biggest advantages of Sketchup is its customizability and affordability. The software offers a range of features that can be tailored to suit your specific design needs, from creating detailed architectural components to designing bespoke furniture pieces. You aren't stuck with a bunch of preloaded components that might not match the style of your project.

Also, unlike more expensive, high-end programs that often come with unnecessary features or a steep price tag, Sketchup provides all the essential 3D tools you need at an accessible price point. Furthermore, **its widespread use across the design industry means there's a wealth of resources, tutorials, and plugins available, making it easy to expand the software's capabilities as your design skills evolve.**

For interior designers, the ability to quickly visualize concepts and communicate them effectively to clients is crucial. Sketchup's simplicity combined with its robust capabilities makes it an ideal choice for visual storytelling. Whether you're a professional designer or just starting, Sketchup offers a versatile platform to explore your creativity, enhance your workflow, and produce impressive, polished visuals that will elevate your interior design projects.

Which Sketchup?

When starting with Sketchup for interior design, you have a few options. There's a plan that includes the browser-based version, Sketchup for Web, and the plan that includes the more robust desktop application, formerly called Sketchup Pro.

There is a free version of Sketchup for Web (it's a bit tricky to access these days!). It has much more limited options but it can be helpful in getting started. I don't recommend it for long term use though.

ONLINE

Sketchup for Web

Sketchup for Web is definitely an impressive program but because it's based online it's not nearly as powerful as the desktop version of the program. The free version is also not intended for commercial use. While it can be helpful in some cases, **it's not what I would recommend for interior design.**

OFFLINE

Sketchup for Desktop

Sketchup for desktop is the downloaded and installed program that has a lot more capabilities. Not only does it give you more options when it comes to 3D modelling, it also gives you options for 2D documentation like scaled plans and elevations. **It is definitely what I recommend learning as an interior designer.**

Choosing a Sketchup plan

Sketchup changes their plan options fairly regularly, but importantly you want to make sure you invest in the version that has the **Pro** options. This includes: Sketchup for Desktop, Layout, Access to the 3D warehouse, and Access to the Extension Warehouse. This gives you the most flexibility and capability as an interior designer. They do offer a more advanced plan (most recently called their Studio plan) that typically includes V-Ray and other options, but I'd only recommend this for very advanced users.

System Requirements & Setup

Before diving into your interior design projects, it's essential to ensure your computer is ready to handle the demands of 3D modeling with Sketchup. Detailed interior models can be resource-intensive, so having the right hardware will make a significant difference in your workflow. While Sketchup is known for its user-friendly interface and efficiency, it's important to work on a computer that can run the software smoothly to avoid any interruptions during your creative process.

COMPUTER

Minimum and Recommended System Requirements

For a seamless experience, your computer should meet or exceed Sketchup's recommended system requirements. Typically, computers designed for gaming or digital modeling will have the necessary specifications. The software runs best on systems with a dedicated graphics card and ample RAM (8GB or more is recommended). The software works on both Windows and Mac, but it's always wise to check the most up-to-date requirements on the official Sketchup website to make sure your setup is ready.

MOUSE & SETUP

Setting Up for Efficiency

A reliable, high-performance computer is just one part of the equation. A mouse with a left click, right click, and a clickable scroll wheel is essential for 3D modeling efficiency. Using a touchpad for Sketchup can quickly become frustrating, especially when navigating complex models or performing precision edits. The scroll wheel is particularly important as it allows you to zoom in and out of your model effortlessly, making your workflow faster and smoother. Lastly, don't underestimate the importance of your workspace setup. A comfortable workspace not only enhances your productivity but also ensures you can work on your designs without unnecessary strain.

Essential Tools

Mastering Sketchup begins with understanding its core tools and how they can be used for interior design tasks. These fundamental tools allow you to quickly create and modify shapes, navigate around your model, and bring your design ideas to life. Below, we'll introduce some of the key tools you'll use most often and provide tips on using them effectively in your interior design workflow.

To get started, it's helpful to display the "**Large Tool Set**," which contains a more comprehensive selection of tools than the default toolbar. To do this, go to View > Toolbars > Large Tool Set. This will give you easy access to all the essential modeling tools and make your workflow more efficient.



Drawing Tools

There are two sections of tools that you'll likely use most often (besides the select tool). The Drawing Tools include the Line tool, the Rectangle tool, and the Circle tool.

Modify tools

The modify tools include the Move tool, the Push/Pull tool, the Rotate tool, and the Scale tool.

Shortcuts

It's also good practice to get comfortable using shortcut keys. Here are some of the most commonly used ones:

Tool / Action	PC Shortcut	Mac Shortcut
Select Tool	Spacebar	Spacebar
Line Tool	L	L
Rectangle Tool	R	R
Circle Tool	C	C
Push/Pull Tool	P	P
Move Tool	M	M
Rotate Tool	Q	Q
Scale Tool	S	S
Orbit Tool	O or Middle Mouse Button	O or Middle Mouse Button
Pan Tool	H or Shift + Middle Mouse Button	H or Shift + Middle Mouse Button
Zoom Tool	Scroll Wheel	Scroll Wheel

How to set up a project

Setting up your Sketchup project correctly from the beginning is key to an efficient and streamlined workflow. Whether you're creating a quick interior concept or developing detailed plans for a client, setting up your project template, tags, and scenes properly will save you time and ensure your design stays organized.

Selecting the Correct Template and Units

The first step in setting up your project is to choose a template that fits your needs as an interior designer. When you open SketchUp for the first time or start a new project, you'll be prompted to select a template. For most interior design projects, the **Architectural Design - Feet and Inches** or **Architectural Design - Millimeters** template works best, depending on whether you use imperial or metric units. These templates are already optimized for architectural work, with the correct scale and units set for designing interior spaces.

Organizing Your Model with Tags

As your interior design projects become more complex, organizing your model with **Tags** (formerly called Layers) is crucial. Tags allow you to control the visibility of different elements in your model, making it easier to work on specific parts without distractions. To set up tags effectively:

1. Open the Tags panel by going to Window > Tags.
2. Click the + icon to create new tags for different model components. For interior design, you might create tags like Walls, Ceiling, Furniture, Windows/Doors, Lighting, and Decor. You might also create tags for each floor of a project.
3. Assign elements in your model to the appropriate tag. To do this, select the object, go to the Entity Info panel, and choose the relevant tag from the dropdown menu.

Using tags, you can quickly toggle the visibility of different parts of your model, which is especially useful when you need to isolate specific elements for editing, focus on certain design aspects, or produce clean visual outputs for presentations.

Chapter 4: Setting up a project

Setting Up Scenes for Easy Navigation

Scenes are a powerful way to save and quickly access different views of your model. By setting up scenes, you can easily navigate between different angles, camera perspectives, or design options. Scenes are particularly helpful for interior designers who want to present various views of a space, showcase different layout options, or create an efficient workflow for developing a design.

To create and manage scenes:

1. Open the Scenes panel by going to Window > Scenes.
2. Click the + icon to add a new scene. This will save your current camera view, as well as any visible tags and active styles.
3. Rename scenes to correspond with the view or aspect you're capturing (e.g., Living Room Overview, Kitchen Elevation, or Plan View).
4. Customize scene settings by right-clicking on a scene in the Scenes panel and choosing Update to adjust visibility, camera angles, or any changes you make to the model.

You can use scenes to quickly cycle through different parts of your project, helping you stay organized and easily produce different views for presentations or documentation.

Tips for Setting Up an Interior Design Project

- **Plan in 2D, Visualize in 3D:** Start by drawing your floor plan in 2D using the Top View and then use tools like Push/Pull to extrude walls and elements into 3D. Setting up scenes for 2D floor plans and 3D perspectives will allow you to jump between the two effortlessly.
- **Tag for Clarity:** If you're working on a large project, you may find it helpful to add sub-tags for more organization (e.g., Furniture-Bedroom, Furniture-Living Room). This gives you even more control over the visibility of your model components.
- **Create Scenes and Tags for Workflow Steps:** Use scenes and tags to capture different stages of your design, like Concept Layout, Material Testing, or Final Renders. This way, you can revisit different stages of your model without disrupting your workflow.

By properly setting up your template, tags, and scenes from the beginning, you'll establish a strong foundation for your interior design project. This approach will not only help you stay organized and efficient but also allow for a smooth design process from initial concept to final presentation.

Importing Floor Plans in Sketchup

Importing 2D floor plans into Sketchup is an incredibly time-saving step in creating accurate 3D models of interior spaces. Whether you're working with a CAD (.dwg) file or an image of a floor plan, Sketchup provides you with flexible options to bring your designs to life quickly.

CAD FILES

Importing .dwg (CAD) Files

One of the quickest ways to start building a 3D model in SketchUp is to import a CAD (.dwg) file. If you're using SketchUp Pro, this process is straightforward:

1. Go to File > Import and select the .dwg file format from the list.
2. Browse to find the file on your computer, and make sure to select Merge Coplanar Faces in the import options if needed (this helps clean up the geometry).
3. Once imported, the CAD file will appear in your model space as a group of lines and shapes, ready to be converted into 3D.

It's crucial to check that the imported floor plan is to scale. Use the Tape Measure tool to measure a known dimension in the plan. If necessary, you can scale the entire plan by using the Scale Tool or resizing it based on your measurement. This ensures your 3D model will be accurate to the real-world dimensions.

IMAGE FILES

Importing an Image of a Floor Plan

If you don't have a .dwg file, you can still work with an image of your floor plan (JPEG, PNG, etc.). Here's how to bring it into SketchUp and trace over it:

1. Go to File > Import and select your image file.
2. In the import options, choose to import the image as a Texture or Image. Importing as an image will keep it as a reference.
3. Place the image on your drawing area. You'll then need to scale it properly to ensure accuracy.

To scale the image:

1. Draw a line according to a known dimension in the original floor plan.
2. Then use the Scale tool to resize the image of the floor plan according to the length of the newly drawn line. (This technique can be used to get a nearly accurate model but for a model that's fully precise you don't want to just trace it, you'll want to draw lines with specific dimensions.)

Quick Design Tips for Interiors

Quickly Creating Furniture and Fixture Mockups

Creating mockups of furniture and fixtures doesn't have to be time-consuming. You can use Sketchup's basic shapes and tools to quickly block out items like sofas, tables, and cabinets. Start with the Rectangle tool (R) to create the footprint of the item, then use Push/Pull (P) to add height. Refine with the Arc tool for rounded edges or the Scale tool to adjust proportions. Obviously, if you're looking for ready-made pieces, the 3D Warehouse is a great resource for importing free models that can be customized to suit your design. Don't be afraid to use bits and pieces from the 3D warehouse to quickly make what you need.

Lighting and Textures for Realistic Renders

Lighting and textures make a huge difference in the realism of your interior models. Sketchup has a variety of materials that can be applied to walls, floors, and furniture. You can edit these materials by right-clicking on them and adjusting color, texture, or opacity for a more realistic look. You can also import your own materials from sources like **Sketchuptextureclub.com**. For lighting, as you get more experienced, consider using plugins like **Enscape** or **Lumion** to create natural and artificial light sources, helping your interior renders come to life. In the meantime, using the **Ambient Occlusion** face style can offer a nice ready-to-go look. You can also fake lighting conditions in programs like **Photoshop**.

Time-Saving Shortcuts for Modeling

To save time while modeling, use SketchUp's shortcuts and best practices:

- **Copy with Move Tool:** Press M to move an object, and then tap Ctrl (Option on Mac) to create a copy. This is great for duplicating elements like chairs or light fixtures.
- **Array Duplicates:** After making a copy with Move, type in "x" followed by a number (e.g., x5) to create an array of duplicates evenly spaced.
- **Group Components Early:** Grouping elements as you model helps keep them organized and prevents unwanted merging of geometry. For example, group walls, floors, and furniture separately.

Recommended Plugins & Extensions

Enhance your interior design workflow with some powerful Sketchup plugins and extensions when you get more practices. Some of these cost extra while others are free - ultimately once you get practiced you'll have more familiarity with what extensions you might want or need.

Rendering Extensions

For hyper-realistic renderings you'll need an extension to help you render materials and lighting effectively. Some of the most popular ones are:

Enscape

Lumion

V-Ray

1001bit Tools (Freeware)

Perfect for quickly creating architectural components like staircases, windows, and doors, saving you time on manual modeling.

Clothworks

A helpful extension that helps you create realistic fabric-like surfaces that follows parameters of draping, etc.

FredoScale

A versatile tool that enhances SketchUp's native scaling options, allowing for more complex and precise modifications to your geometry.

Chapter 8: Exporting



Exporting and Sharing Your Designs

Exporting 2D Images of Your Model

To export images or plans:

Go to File > Export > 2D Graphic for images like JPEG, PNG, or PDF. This is great for exporting rendered views for presentations or further editing in Photoshop.

Sharing Your 3D Model with Clients or Team Members

If you're collaborating with others, Trimble Connect is a useful tool for sharing your models in an interactive format. Simply save your file to Trimble Connect and share it as a link. Recipients can then view the model on a browser by simply following the link.

Using LayOut to Create Scaled Plan Drawings & Elevations

LayOut, a companion tool for SketchUp Pro, allows you to turn your 3D models into professional 2D drawings, such as floor plans and elevations, at accurate scales.

Getting Started

To use LayOut:

1. In SketchUp, go to File > Send to LayOut. This links your model to a new LayOut document.
2. Choose a template that suits your needs, like letter-sized pages or architectural formats.

Creating Scaled Views

1. Insert Viewports: Go to File > Insert and add your SketchUp model. A viewport of your model will appear on the page.
2. Adjust Scene and Scale: In the SketchUp Model panel, select the scene (e.g., plan or elevation view) and set the desired scale (e.g., 1/4" = 1' or 1:50).

Annotations & Dimensions

Use LayOut tools to add details to your drawings:

- Dimensions: Use the Dimension tool to add precise measurements.
- Text and Labels: Add annotations or titles using the Text tool and Label tool.
- Line Weights: Customize line weights for clarity, like thicker lines for walls.

Exporting Your Drawings

Once complete, export your LayOut document as a PDF, image, or DWG/DXF file to share or print.

LayOut helps transform your 3D models into polished, to-scale 2D drawings, bridging the gap between design concepts and clear documentation.

Next Steps: Sketchup Workflow Optimization

An efficient Sketchup workflow is vital for maximizing productivity, accuracy, and quality in your interior design projects. By modeling with purpose and intent, you can save time and produce refined, presentable designs ready for client presentations or detailed visualizations. The key is to develop a structured workflow that fits the specific needs of your project—whether that's quick concept modeling, creating a few polished visualizations, or developing a full drawing and presentation package.

Organized Tags and Scene Management

Start by setting up tags (formerly layers) and scenes to structure your model effectively. Tags allow you to organize elements like furniture, walls, or lighting for better visibility control, while scenes let you quickly access specific views, such as floor plans or elevations. For efficient modeling, establish a standard tag checklist and set up predetermined scenes for your key views from the start of every project. This organization helps you easily navigate and present different parts of your model without getting bogged down in unnecessary detail.

Efficient Modeling Techniques

Adopt efficient modeling techniques to improve speed without compromising detail:

- Use components and groups to manage repeated elements like furniture or windows, which keeps your model lighter and easier to edit.
- Leverage keyboard shortcuts for your most-used tools to quickly switch between functions—saving valuable time and effort. For example, the space bar returns you to the Select tool instantly.
- Avoid over-modeling early on. Start with basic forms and add details gradually, ensuring your model doesn't get too heavy too quickly.

Clear, Step-by-Step Strategy

Define your goal upfront—whether it's a quick 3D model for testing ideas or a detailed model for client presentations. Break down the project into manageable phases, such as:

- **Concept Modeling:** Create basic shapes for walls and floors to quickly test layout ideas.
- **Adding Detail:** Gradually add furniture, fixtures, and detailed elements as needed.
- **Polishing and Visualization:** Apply materials, textures, and lighting for a final render.

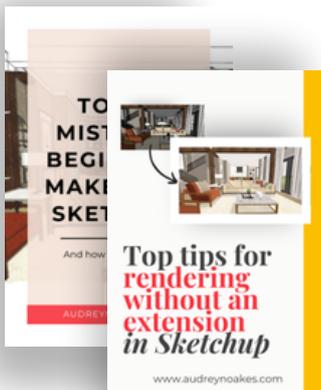
Stay focused on one step at a time to avoid distractions and unnecessary details. This approach ensures that each stage of your modeling process aligns with your project goals, ultimately leading to a finished product that is polished, organized, and professional.

Final thoughts

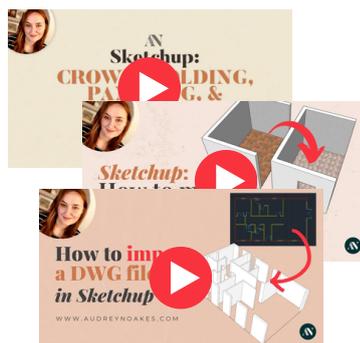
Looking to learn more?

I love teaching all things interior design software, including Sketchup. Check out my blog posts, Youtube videos, and online course Sketchup for Interior Designers to learn more.

Blog Posts



Youtube Videos



Sketchup for interior designers online course

Core Skills + Efficient Workflows for interiors

[LEARN MORE](#)

About me

Hi, I'm Audrey, and I teach interior design software. With experience at various interior design schools in the UK, I've helped hundreds of students, from beginners to seasoned professionals, master their software skills.

The biggest challenge they face is often the software itself—but it doesn't have to be daunting. You don't need to know everything, and these tools aren't impossible—they just require the right foundations and practice. Unfortunately, many online resources miss the mark on what interior designers truly need.

That's where I come in. My focus is on teaching software specifically for interior designers, providing targeted support whether you're in the studio or learning on your own.

