Open floor plans are becoming an increasingly popular design trend in today's homes. The reason: They go well with modern lifestyles because they allow activities in the home to easily spill from one part of the house to another.

Open floor plans, however, have a drawback: they don’t always clearly define or separate one space from another. For example, where does a dining area end and a living area start?

In the past, homeowners have used furniture placement, wall colors or area rugs to help define these spaces. Now, designers have added another option: "area ceilings."

The idea behind the new interior design concept is similar to that of an area rug, only on a different surface. In the case of an area ceiling, designers break up the bland, white expanse of a flat drywall ceiling by varying the ceiling material. They do so by simply installing 12-inch by 12-inch ceiling tiles onto an existing drywall ceiling over the area they want to highlight.
Ceiling tiles have no visible grid system, which makes them the best choice for an area ceiling. Moreover, installation is fast and easy because of a tongue-and-groove design that helps assure proper alignment, a level surface and a smooth fit. And, they can be painted.

Area Ceilings Separate Living Spaces

To help illustrate the design concept, Armstrong World Industries, a manufacturer of residential ceilings with headquarters in Lancaster, Pa., worked with a homeowner on an area ceiling installation. 

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To customize the ceiling even further, the homeowner painted the “area ceiling” a copper color to give it a metallic look. Then he sponge-painted the tiles with green paint to duplicate the patina that copper develops with age.

In this particular case, the homeowner wanted to separate the dining area from the living area. He did so by creating a rectangular area ceiling over the living area using Armstrong’s new TinTile ceiling tiles. TinTile ceiling tiles duplicate the look of stamped metal ceilings that were popular in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Following installation of the tile, he sainted them a copper color to give the area ceiling a metallic look. Then, to customize the ceiling even more, he sponge painted the tiles with green paint to duplicate the natural patina effect that copper develops with age. The end
result is an interior finish that not only defines the living area but also adds personality to the entire open plan space.

Weekend DIY Project

Designers at Armstrong say installing an area ceiling on an existing drywall ceiling is an easy do-it-yourself project that can be
completed in a weekend. Here are the basic step-by-step instructions:

**Plan the area ceiling layout.** Before you begin, make sure the existing ceiling is flat, clean and free of peeling paint. For the most effective area ceiling installation, consider the alignment with walls, windows and doors; the living space to be defined; traffic patterns; and the visual relationship of the area ceiling to the surrounding spaces.

**Position the area ceiling layout.** If possible, create your area ceiling with dimensions based on a multiple of 12 inches. This will make the most efficient
If you use a metallic color and want to obtain a patina effect, randomly dab the tiles with green or blue using a natural sea sponge.

use of material and pattern repeat. Measure and mark the area ceiling location on the existing drywall ceiling.

Prepare the ceiling tiles. Trim the perimeter tiles with a utility knife. Remove the tongue detail from leading edge tiles, and the staple flange detail from trailing edge tiles.

Install the ceiling tiles. Select one corner of the area ceiling as a starting point and position and attach the tiles until the area is filled. (Detailed installation instructions are contained in the ceiling tile carton.)

Install a trim molding around the perimeter of the area ceiling. Choose a molding with an edge that is at least five-eights of an inch thick. This will leave a slight shadow line around the edge of the area. Paint the molding, let it dry and nail it through the furring tape into the ceiling.

Paint the ceiling tiles, if desired. For best results, apply two coats of paint using a roller with a quarter-inch nap. Wait 24 hours between coats. If you use a metallic color and want to obtain a patina effect, randomly dab the tiles with green or blue using a natural sea sponge. Vary the placement of the paint and texture of the sponge to create an authentic look.