

**Right at Home****Kimberley Seldon**[More stories by Kimberley](#)

Six small-space strategies

Making effective use of space is one of design's most fundamental issues and the task becomes more urgent still when that space is limited. Perhaps we can thank soaring real estate prices or an ever-increasing urban population for the proliferation of dimensionally challenged homes and condos. Regardless, whether you're a first time home buyer, an empty nester, or transitioning from suburb to city - diminishing floor space is a modern reality. Here are six small space strategies that can help keep you livin' large.

- 1. Utilize every inch of space by incorporating vertical elements.**
Tall bookshelves, stately armoires, and floor to ceiling shelving are just some of the elements that help homeowners utilize vertical space. In the kitchen, opt for cabinets that go all the way to the ceiling. Consider a Murphy bed when a room will be called on to accommodate an occasional overnight guest. Chris King, owner of The Wall Bed King says, "Its ability to disappear fully into the wall makes it ideal for occasional use and means it can sit discreetly in just about any room in the house." You can also visually emphasize a room's height and distract the eye from limited floor space by hanging striped wallpaper, ideal for entrance halls.
- 2. Emphasize negative space.**
In order to visually expand a room's size designers and architects will include negative space where possible. Negative space refers to the areas of emptiness that surround an item of furniture such as the underside of a coffee table. By choosing furniture with legs rather than skirts, incorporating glass where possible, and adding reflective elements such as mirror, crystal, and silver to the interior, you can amplify available light and legroom, creating a feeling of vastness. In addition, choose furniture with narrow arms rather than over-stuffed rolled versions and opt for a sectional sofa with no arms which can be repositioned in the event of a move and has the added benefit of being easier to get through narrow doorways and into apartment elevators.
- 3. Maximize storage space with built-ins and modular furniture.**
Most small rooms benefit from built-in or modular furniture, which effectively utilizes every inch of space - vertically and horizontally. In a diminutive kitchen, employ a banquette to maximize seating and take advantage of hidden storage. In open-concept rooms, built-ins such as bookcases provide much needed storage, help contain clutter (essential in small spaces), and define individual rooms without enclosing them. Nitty Gritty Reproductions owner David Ross says his custom designed sleigh-bed (with under-bed cedar drawer) is one of his best sellers.
- 4. Fool the eye with large-scale drama.**
Occasionally designers will break all the rules and go for large-scale drama within a small room. An exuberant approach, as evidenced by the large floral patterned walls, visually frees space from its confines and sets a dramatic backdrop conducive to entertaining. Try this approach in powder rooms. As an alternative, opt for several larger pieces of furniture to give the appearance of opulence and drama; expansive moods that counter balance the narrowness of diminutive quarters.
- 5. Monochromatic colour schemes visually enlarge the space.**
Monochromatic colour schemes, where all colours are kept close in tone and value, help visually expand a room's dimensions. Without contrast (the strong distinction between two values such as black and white) the eye is able to move through a room uninterrupted, creating an illusion of additional space. To create interest, incorporate a variety of textures within monochromatic schemes.
- 6. Look for flexible furnishings.**
In today's modern homes, rooms are often required to provide more than one function so multi-purpose furniture accommodates flexibility. A guest may be temporarily housed in the dining room, living room, or home office by including a built-in banquette. A large banquette provides ample seating for visitors who are looking for somewhere to curl up and read or watch TV but once the cushions are removed; the banquette seating becomes a bed. In addition, choose furniture that does double duty - a coffee table that rises to eating height or a pair of console tables that can be pushed together to form an impromptu dining table.

Dare to dream big, even in a small space and your rooms can be a triumph of style over size.

Sources

Nitty Gritty Reproductions - 170 King Street East, Toronto, ON (416)364-1393